Concept & Form

Post-philosophical Studies in Contemporary Art

Andrew Wear

BA (Hons)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Tasmania

June 2010

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ABSTRACT

This thesis identifies a problem within current philosophical perspectives concerning contemporary visual art, namely, the underestimation of the unique qualities of a concept in visual form. There is a related deficit in the literature about both the practice of contemporary art making as a cognitive manipulation of concept and form, and the ways in which the viewer might dissect the relationship between concept and form in philosophical inquiry.

This thesis explores two central claims. First, that visual art allows for a spatial and temporal conflation of concept that manufactures a unique philosophical realm more readily cognitively assimilated than with the written or spoken word. Second, that a *post-philosophical* reading of some contemporary art works is possible whereby both pursuits might inform each other, forging expanded potential in inquiry.

The thesis takes the form of detailed case studies of single works of art and their relationship with particular models/instances/paradigms of philosophical thinking. Presenting select works of art by Joseph Beuys, Anselm Kiefer and Hanne Darboven, the thesis explores how this range of contemporary works of art engage concurrently produced works of philosophy. This thesis ends with the author's personal account of the cognitive manipulation of concept and form as an insight into the creation of a work of art.

The thesis submits that a greater understanding of contemporary art practice – from conception to exhibition – can vitalize philosophical inquiry by illuminating the cognitive process beyond written and spoken language. Scope for further research might incorporate questions concerning the emancipatory qualities of a more accessible philosophical realm, particularly concerning pedagogical or political engagement with visual representation. Such research would necessitate ongoing attention to the method and practice of 'reading' visual representation.

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INTRODUCTION

After philosophy comes philosophy. But it is altered by the after.

- Jean-François Lyotard[1]

This thesis contends that visual art has specific qualities that admit entry to a unique philosophical realm. To demonstrate this, the thesis focuses on single works of art and their respective relationship to philosophy, shaping an understanding of a work of visual art as a symbiosis of concept and form. Having established this relationship, the thesis then proposes that such works inhabit a unique philosophical realm from whence philosophy might *retrieve* critical understanding. To consider this realm as *not of* the traditional perception of what philosophy *is*, I have, whether reasonably or not, chosen to define this realm as *post-philosophical.*

Central to this proposition is the questioning of how we make the distinction between concept and form. While this thesis develops to present a more detailed and complex delineation of the philosophical configuration of concept and form, it is, at this stage, literal in reference. That is; by concept, this thesis considers the formation of disparate ideas into a collective cognitive force. And, by form, this thesis considers a sensuous, tangible (and in the context of this thesis, humanly created) object. Naturally, the two notions are necessarily and multifariously related; however, this thesis is primarily concerned with a particular understanding of concept and form in symbiosis when presented as a work of visual art.

A significant part of this study is committed to the response of artists and philosophers to Nazism and the Holocaust, and their contribution to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung.*[2] The

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[1] Jean-François Lyotard "Foreword. After the Words" in Joseph Kosuth *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings 1966-1990* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: MIT Press, 1991) p xvi

process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* has been central to Germany's cultural and political reconstruction, and, while artists and philosophers form the vanguard of this venture, their contributions are generally considered independently. Central to the thesis' determination for the two pursuits to be considered in unison is the belief that it will provide an extended hermeneutic frame.

Art theory is replete with the philosophical elucidations of art; however, the objective of this thesis is to present the work of art, and its specific qualities, for the elucidation of philosophy. In observing the response of artists and philosophers to questions concerning Germany's history, it has become clear that while the cognitive procedure and resulting representations are different, their objectives are similar, if not the same. This conclusion determined the structure of this thesis: to present art produced in these conditions as receptive to the rigors of philosophical inquiry, so that these works might then become critical to philosophical investigation of these conditions. To achieve this, cognitive procedures of making a work of art, and the resulting work of art, are presented as critical loci for philosophical review.

The key figure in this thesis is Joseph Beuys. While the abundant documentation of Beuys's life and work was a determinant in this role, more critical to the choice was Beuys's demand for an *expanded definition* of art. Beuys came to define this further with his Social Sculpture theory,[3] essentially a determined dissolution of the distinction between life and art culminating in both a philosophical approach to the making of art and, I suggest, a philosophical quality to the resulting work. While a radical stance at the time,

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[2] Translations of *Vergangenheitsbewaltigung* vary somewhat, however the most accurate is *the struggle to come to terms with the past.*

[3] Beuys constructed multiple systems whereby the creative process became fused with social and political engagement; however the following statement (albeit steeped in the rhetoric of activism) remains the most oft-cited explanation: "SOCIAL SCULPTURE – how we mold and shape the world in which we live: SCULPTURE AS AN EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS; EVERYONE AN ARTIST" Joseph Beuys, "Introduction" in Carin Kuoni *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1990) p. 19. An example of how this 'project' has become academically consolidated is the establishment of the Social Sculpture Research Unit at the Oxford Brookes University in the United Kingdom. Its mission statement declares: "The SSRU encourages and explores transdisciplinary creativity and vision towards the shaping of a humane and ecologically viable society. It engages with Beuys thinking and work, as well as those before and after him - making available some of the insights, inquiries and explorations in this multidimensional field." Social Sculpture Research Unit website: http://www.social-sculpture.org/index.htm. Accessed 17 October, 2009. 12:24.

this has come to be embraced by countless artists since, most notably those working within the Conceptual art and Performance art movements.[4]

The availability of such extensive documentation allows a thorough and detailed historical preview of the artist and his work, followed by a mapping of the interpretive literature and critical reception of this work. With this information, the reader can then enter the analysis of a single work of art (in this case, a vitrinal installation titled *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*) with a substantial body of literature to assist. Therefore, while establishing a methodological precedent to fulfil the thesis' objectives, it also contributes to Beuysian scholarship by constructing a bridge between the artist and his philosophical contemporaries. Whilst the theoretical backdrop to Beuys's work was a determining factor in his selection for study, and is inextricable from his practice, it is the work of art, and what it contributes to philosophical inquiry, that remains the primary focus. In order to shed light on this contribution, I pair *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* with readings from Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*.

The many differences between Beuys and Adorno paradoxically serve to highlight their compatibility, especially concerning matters left unrealised within their respective projects. Thus, despite the images of Beuys (who was raised in the Rhenish Catholic tradition and actively served in the German forces as a pilot in the *Luftwaffe*) and Adorno (who, as the son of a Jewish merchant[5] and an academically active Marxist social philosopher forced to flee Nazi Germany) appearing antithetical, their post-war careers saw them both take the critical blowtorch to the cultural legacies of Nazism and question the (im)possibilities of a post-Holocaust German culture.[6]

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[4] That is, the physicality of Beuys's engagement with, and subjective nature of his practice are emphasized in performance art, while the conceptual features informing both the production and objects of his practice are critical to the expansive philosophical field (that might broadly be perceived according, but not limited to, metaphysical categories) so critical to the Conceptual Art movement of the mid- to late-1960s and early 1970s

[5] Theodor W Adorno was born Theodor Ludwig Wiesengrund Adorno in 1903, in Frankfurt. He was the sole child of wine merchant Oscar Alexander and Maria Barbara (*nèe* Calvelli-Adorno) Wiesengrund. In Stefan Muller-Doohm's exhaustively researched *Adorno: A Biography* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004) he contests the generally accepted narrative of Oscar being an assimilated Jew who had converted to Protestantism, instead claiming that the family leant more towards his mother's dominant Catholic tendencies, perhaps explaining Theodor Weisengrund's eventual adoption of his mother's maiden surname upon becoming a naturalized American citizen "Wiesengrund" was abbreviated to "W". Irrespective of the biographical disputes, his father's Jewish lineage greatly determined the course of his life as a German living under the threat of Nazism.

[6] For further detailof the conceptual connection between Adorno and Beuys, particularly with regard to delineating those points upon which the two are similar (modernist experimentation, refusal of representation) or distinct, see pp. 40-42

This thesis suggests that while the realisation of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* and the Beuysian aesthetic differ, this questioning creates the bridge between their pursuits. The differences between them, and the expansive scope of their lives' work means that some refinement is required in order to keep this thesis to a manageable size. Thus, *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* is 'read' alongside selected tracts from *Aesthetic Theory*. The aesthetic qualities of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, and their compatibility with Adorno's musings in *Aesthetic Theory*, most explicitly in the chapter titled 'The Ugly, the Beautiful and Technique' are highlighted:

> Art must take up the cause of what is proscribed as ugly, though no longer in order to integrate it or mitigate it or to reconcile it with its own existence through humor that is more offensive than anything repulsive. Rather, in the ugly, art must denounce the world that creates and reproduces the ugly in its own image, even if in this too the possibility persists that sympathy with the degraded will reverse into concurrence with degradation...The aesthetic condemnation of the ugly is dependent on the inclination, verified by social psychology, to equate, justly, the ugly with the expression of suffering and by projecting it, to despise it. Hitler's empire put this theorum to the test, as it put the whole of bourgeois ideology to the test: The more torture went on in the basement, the more insistently they made sure that the roof rested on columns.[7]

Following the war, Beuys's experienced nearly two decades of depression (arising from the shame and guilt as *perpetrator*) that elicited the traumatic aesthetic that permeated his work. While the polarity of Adorno's hermeneutic position is clear, he too came to idealise an emergent anti-aesthetic in the post-war German condition. The following passage is typical of Adorno's rebuttal of normative aesthetics in *Aesthetic Theory* and came to shape his belief in modern art as critical to the understanding (and, ideally, the diminution) of suffering:

> ...it would be preferable that some fine day art vanish altogether than that it forget the suffering that is its expression and in which form has its substance. This suffering is the humane content that unfreedom counterfeits as positivity. If in fulfilment of the wish a future art were once again to become positive, then the suspicion that negativity were in actuality persisting would become acute; this suspicion is ever present, regression threatens unremittingly, and freedom – surely

[7] Theodor W Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory* (Originally published as *Asthetische Theorie* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970) Trans Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997). p. 49

> freedom from the principle of possession – cannot be possessed. But then what would art be, as the writing of history, if it shook off the memory of accumulated suffering.[8]

Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964 is undeniably imbued with this sense of suffering, and when considering the work alongside Adorno's text we are witness to a singular symbiosis of concept and form realised. Moreover, even when these works are considered individually, the activation of this symbiotic moment should enrich any subsequent viewing or reading. Indeed, that this phase of Beuys's work precedes the refinement of Adorno's aesthetic philosophy strengthens the aforementioned claim regarding the inversion of the informative role of art with regards philosophy. That is, while there is no documentary evidence of Adorno having viewed Beuys's work, I argue that even in this fictitious alliance a *post-philosophical* realm emerges within which both Beuys and Adorno might be re-imagined.

As the thesis progresses from the study of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* to the dissection of works of art by Anselm Kiefer and Hanne Darboven, this pairing of a work of art and a work of philosophy becomes paradoxically, but necessarily, weakened. As artists develop increasingly sophisticated aesthetic and conceptual stances, their work begins to diverge from their philosophical contemporaries. Thus, while Jürgen Habermas' philosophy is presented alongside Kiefer's art (in this instance, the 1973 painting *Notung*) to demonstrate the divergent paths artists and philosophers take, it simultaneously acknowledges that their shared concern for how the past is represented brings them together.[9] Naturally, one might simply extend the application of Adorno's theory to Kiefer, or, for that matter, Heidegger, for whom Kiefer holds a particular affection. However, it is as contemporaries that Kiefer and Habermas operate 'together' (within this thesis) to extract the conceptual and formal dimensions of this critical period in Germany's history.

The choice of works by Kiefer and Darboven was made carefully so as to sustain conceptual consistency (engagement with *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) yet present varied stylistic and aesthetic approaches to the problem. Furthermore, as *Notung* and *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* are not on public view (unlike Beuys's *Auschwitz Demonstration*

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[8] ibid, p. 338.

[9] The peculiarities of this union are explicated further on pp. 151-152.

1956-1964), the studies of these works develop a sub-thesis determining how the conditions within which the subject comes to view a work of art impact on that work's capacity to be considered in philosophical terms. The technological advances in both the quality of reproduction and the distribution of imagery make it increasingly less likely that the viewer of art is in a gallery or museum potentially leading to consequences for both art and philosophy. Finally, these studies act to expand the academic literature detailing the work of these two important, yet academically under-represented artists. By imparting multiple modest claims, this thesis thus presents a greater, unified argument for the increased role of the work of art in philosophical study, while offering a means by which this engagement might be enacted.

While these claims appear reasonable, there is negligible literature presenting the work of the artist as complementing or supplementing philosophical investigation. Moreover, literature that considers the cognitive processes determining the production of the work of art and the work of philosophy as comparable is similarly scarce. When presented in these terms, the desire to address this deficiency appears timely, rather than either extravagant or ambitious. What becomes increasingly important is the methodology underpinning such a pursuit. This thesis is informed by the consideration of *how* the relationship between art and philosophy is understood. That is, while arguing for the need for greater consideration of this relationship, it acknowledges the problems such work engenders, as the recent publications by George Didi-Huberman indicate. For Didi-Huberman, the interstice between the work of art and the viewer[10] has become the critical methodological juncture determining the success of such attempts at understanding:

> This book would simply like to interrogate the *tone of certainty* that prevails so often in the beautiful discipline of the history of art. It should go without saying that the element of *history*, its inherent fragility with regard to all procedures of verification, its extremely lacunary character, particularly in the domain of manmade figurative objects – it goes without saying that all of this should incite the greatest modesty. The historian is, in every sense of the word, only the *fictor*, which is to say the modeller, the artisan, the author, the inventor of whatever past he offers us. And when it is in the element of *art* that he thus develops his search for lost time, the historian no longer even finds

[10] Here, *viewer* may be read as *interpreter*, *critic*, or, in Huberman's most contentiously loaded sense of the word, *art historian*.

himself facing a circumscribed object, but rather something like a liquid or gas expansion – a cloud that changes shape constantly as it passes overhead.[11]

This thesis reserves the *tone of certainty* for its commitment to the values inherent in bringing to philosophical work an accompanying visual representation, while respecting Didi-Huberman's understanding of the interpretive modesty the work of art demands of its viewers. Only in those instances where the artist has defined the placement of *this object here*, or *that brush-stroke there* as determined by an identifiable source of motivation or inspiration does this thesis adopt certainty. Rather, the thesis presents the work of art as companion to the work of philosophy, generating questions about what it is that each activity *can* or *cannot* contribute to the examination of a problem. After all, it is the question – not the certainty of an answer – that activates the unique philosophical realm explored herein.

Of the few texts that engage both art and philosophy, Matthew Biro's *Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger*[12] stands, in title at least, as an exception. However, its macrostructural chronicling of Kiefer's work as relative to Heidegger's philosophy is problematised by the dilution such an expansive reading necessitates. Elsewhere, Dan Adler's monograph *Hanne Darboven: Cultural History 1880-1983*[13], published concurrent with this thesis' completion, serves to strengthen the claim that Darboven's installation is worthy of critical dissection Furthermore, it confirms that presenting a single work of art for critical dissection is an exemplary means by which to enter the conceptual realm from whence it was formed. However, limitations imposed on Adler by the format of the *One Work* series[14] mean that certain features crucial to Darboven's aesthetic formulation are absent in the text, most notably the importance of musical composition and performance

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[11] Georges Didi-Huberman *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art* (Originally published as *Devant l'image: Question posèe aux fin d'une histoire de l'art* Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1990) Trans. John Goodman (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005) p. 2.

[12] Mathew Biro. *Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (Cambridge University Press, 1998)

[13] Dan Adler. *Hanne Darboven: Cultural History 1880-1983* (London: Afterall Books, 2009)

[14] *One Work* is the series title under which Afterall Books (London) have published Adler's monograph. Regarding the *One Work* series, the publisher's stated intention is to present ".. a single work of art considered in detail by a single author. The focus of the series is on contemporary art and its aim to provoke debate about significant moments in art's recent development. Each book contains a comprehensive and detailed formal description of the work, followed by a critical mapping of the aesthetic and cultural context I which it was made and has gone on to shape.. The books insist that a single contemporary wok of art ..can affect our understanding of art in general." Introductory statement, present in all Afterall Publishers *One Work* editions (London: Afterall Books)

as relevant to her conceptual preoccupation with temporality. A whole section of this thesis' investigation into the conceptual construction of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* addresses this absence by considering this interaction and the implications for trans-aesthetic practice.

Interestingly, the type of association this thesis seeks to forge between the work of art and the work of philosophy is mimicked by several authors' integration of Joseph Beuys's work with theological and esoteric readings. The question of why the philosophical association remains so elusive is uncertain, as it becomes evident that Beuys is only periodically concerned with theology (as outlined in Friedhelm Mennekes' book *Joseph Beuys: Christus DENKEN/THINKING Christ*) and esotericism (as explicated by John F. Moffitt in *Occultism in Avant-Garde Art: The Case of Joseph Beuys*), while his engagement with philosophical themes not only incorporates these periodical concerns, but supplants them. Admittedly, the collection of essays that constitutes the text *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy* (most notably Gene Ray's essay "Joseph Beuys and the Auschwitz Sublime" and Max Reithmann's essay "In the Rubblefield of German History"[15]), go some way to advancing the philosophical claims this thesis makes. However, none presents insight into, or a model for reading Beuys's practice as philosophically grounded. Moreover, the predominance of publications in the form of collected essays is evidence of a deficiency of sustained or expansive research into the relationship between the work of art and the work of philosophy.

Another approach to reviewing the literature (or deficiency in the literature) detailing the relationship between the work of art and the work of philosophy is to consider literary works by practicing artists outlining the conceptual premises of their work. These are

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[15] Ray invokes Kant's notion of "negative *Darstellung*" in relation to a passage detailing *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*. He then continues: "Theodor Adorno implicitly pointed to this notion as the basis for an ethics of representation as early as 1961." Gene Ray "Joseph Beuys and the Auschwitz Sublime" *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers/The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 2001) p 65 Reithmann not only explicates Beuys's work according to the philosophy of Fichte and Schiller, but presents Beuys's own musings on their works as stated in an interview between artist and author: "I asked Beuys in an interview, when he started talking about Schiller, whether in Kant's thought aesthetics did not have a different role than it does in the expanded concept of art...Beuys sidestepped Kant's greater precision and answered that aesthetics had started off in the wrong direction shortly after Kant. Nevertheless Schiller had 'written the most fundamental aesthetics.' For Schiller 'had attributed everything to the human being and the human essence: the drive to create form, the drive to play, the ethical drive, etc.'" Max Reithmann "In the Rubblefield of German History" ibid., p. 144.

insightful, yet by necessity fail to present any general model or formula by which the reader/viewer might approach a work of art with the intention of extracting its value or meaning according to philosophical inquiry. It should be noted that presenting the notion of any general model or formula is tentative to say the least, and must be understood according to this thesis' modest framework of presenting single works of art as complementary or supplementary to a selected passage of thought. Nevertheless, while Jospeh Kosuth's collected writings on art (presented in the book *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990*) are replete with insightful commentary on the conceptual underpinnings of his visual work, the problems of such subjective specificity are evident:

> The twentieth century brought in a time which could be called 'the end of philosophy and the beginning of art...In no mechanistic sense is there a connection between philosophy's 'ending' and art's 'beginning', but I don't find this occurrence entirely coincidental. Though the same reasons may be responsible for both occurrences the connection is made by me. I bring this all up to analyse art's function and subsequently its viability. And I do so to enable others to understand the reasoning of my – and, by extension, other artists' – art, as well as to provide a clear understanding of the term 'Conceptual art'.[16]

While Kosuth contends that, "by extension" his analysis contributes to the understanding of works by other artists, by implication he distinguishes these artists according to their practice as *Conceptual* artists. That he immediately follows this statement with the following quotes from fellow Conceptual artists emphasizes this:

> The main qualification to the lesser position of painting is that advances in art are certainly not always formal ones. – Donald Judd (1963)
>
> Half or more of the best new work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture. – Donald Judd (1965)
>
> The idea becomes a machine that makes the art – Sol LeWitt (1965)[17]

Such commentary perpetuates Conceptual art's dominant role in art's engagement with philosophical themes.[18] While greater scope and validity is encouraged by the proffering

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[16] Joseph Kosuth "Art After Philosophy" First published in *Studio International* (Volume 178, no 915) pp 134-137. Reprinted in *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings 1966-1990* p. 15

[17] ibid.

of the *anti*-aesthetic[19] as a philosophical grounding for this dominance, it continues to isolate those artists for whom the aesthetic (if not the conceptual underpinnings) of art production remains informed by tradition. As Arthur C. Danto has noted in response to Hal Foster's ground-breaking publication *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-Modern Culture*, this is not a productive stance:

> Whatever revolution it was that Foster and his peers may have believed in did not really materialize. Painting did not die, the museum did not wither away...In the two decades since *Anti-Aesthetic*'s publication, it has become increasingly evident that ours is an era of radical openness.[20]

This thesis makes it clear that Kiefer's role as an actor in the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is based on a sophisticated level of engagement with the philosophical themes that determine its progress. Therefore, this thesis challenges the claim that only those works of art deemed *Conceptual* are compatible with philosophical inquiry.

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[18] Evidence of this dominance can be found in the essays collated by Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens in *Philosophy and Conceptual Art* (Oxford. Oxford University Press, 2007). While an excellent contribution to the field, its delineation of Conceptual art effectively denies an artist like Kiefer entry to the discourse. Consider. "We would like to advance the following five characteristic features of conceptual art, with the caveat that, in doing so, we wish to firmly avoid advancing a conclusive definition as such

1 Conceptual art aims to remove the traditional emphasis on sensory pleasure and beauty, replacing it with an emphasis on ideas and the view that the art object is to be 'dematerialized' 2 Conceptual art sets out to challenge the limits of the identity and definition of artworks and questions the role of agency in art-making. 3 Conceptual art seeks, often as a response to modernism, to revise the role of art and its critics so that art-making becomes a kind of art-criticism, at times also promoting anti-consumerist and anti-establishment views. 4. Conceptual art rejects traditional artistic media, particularly the so-called plastic arts, in favour of new media od production such as photography, film, events, bodies, mixed media, ready-mades and more. 5. Conceptual art replaces illustrative representation by what some call 'semantic representation – semantic not only (not necessarily) in the sense of words appearing on or in the work itself, but in the sense of depending on meaning being conveyed through a text or supporting discourse." pp. xii-xiii.

[19] Hal Foster's *Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-Modern Culture* (Port Townsend, Washington· Bay Press, 1983) has become a seminal art historical text. With a wide range of contributors, among them those as theoretically polarized as Jurgen Habermas and Frederic Jameson, this collection is integral to countless academies offering courses in art theory. Many texts within address the caesura between the aesthetic and the anti-aesthetic as simultaneous to and explicitly relative to the caesura between the modern and the post-modern Arthur C Danto challenges this in his essay "Kalliphobia in Contemporary Art" by reference to the collection where he states: "As near as I can make out, Foster meant to frame an opposition between modernism and postmodernism, which he gingerly identifies as anti-aesthetic." p. 26.

[20] Arthur C. Danto "Kalliphobia in Contemporary Art" *Art Journal* (Volume 63, no 2, Summer 2004) p. 27

It should be noted that comparable writings by painters – even among the most highly regarded and acclaimed – are restricted by similar limitations. In the collation of Mark Rothko's note-books, *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art*, the essay "Particularization and Generalization" opens with a passage that goes some way to correcting the limitations of the aforementioned texts:

> A painting is a statement of the artist's notions of reality in terms of plastic speech. In that sense the painter must be likened to the philosopher rather than to the scientist. For science is a statement of the laws that govern a specific phenomenon or category of matter or energy within the specific limits and conditions of its operations; philosophy, however, must combine all these specialized truths within a single system.[21]

Although it is certain that Rothko is alert to the variations in art practice active around him, his ongoing reference to *painting* as the exemplary representational form for philosophical consideration limits the reader to this formulation. One of the primary tasks for this thesis is to provide the reader with a means by which she or he can translate and transfer methods of interpretation from one form of artwork to another.

According to this review of the literature detailing the relationship between art and philosophy, it overwhelmingly fails to present the work of art as informant to philosophy. This unidirectional association confines the consideration of philosophy strictly to art history or art theory texts. Art theory journals, notably *October* and *Artforum*,[22] are home to the most sophisticated and critical discourse surrounding the relationship philosophy has with art practice; however there is a growing sense that the criticality for which these publications are renowned is troubled:

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[21] Mark Rothko "Particularization and Generalization" *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art* New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 2004. p 22

[22] *October* is a quarterly journal, published by the MIT Press since 1976. In its first issue, Rosalind Krauss outlined its objectives: "We have named this journal in celebration of that moment in our century when revolutionary practice, theoretical inquiry and artistic innovation were joined in a manner exemplary and unique.. *October* is planned as a quarterly that will be more than merely interdisciplinary: one that articulates with maximum directness the structural and social interrelationships of artistic practice .*October*'s structure and policy are predicated upon a dominant concern· the renewal and strengthening of critical discourse through intensive review of present artistic practice." "About October" *October* (Volume 1, Spring, 1976) pp. 3-4. *Artforum* has been published, monthly, since 1962, and, while more visually formatted that *October* (and replete with advertising from private galleries) still maintains a critical approach to arts practice

> Certain time-honoured ideas about the role and form of criticism within culture – ones which have habitually and variously underwritten the practices of artists and critics for centuries – have been shaken by the shifting cultural priorities of a changing world.[23]

Gavin Butt's introductory essay, and the edited collection that makes up the valuable contribution *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance* elaborate on this theme and identify a paradoxical problem in the relationship between art and philosophy:

> When referring to "theory" in this shorthand manner we usually invoke a melange of theoretical paradigms and perspectives which have come to be dominant in the Western humanities: semiotics, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and post-structuralism. But the problem seems to arise when such hermeneutic tools – originally deployed to critique various forms of power and authority within cultural and artistic representations – have come to be credited with an authority *of their own*. The final paradoxical twist comes about when a body of work renowned for its deconstruction of authorial value comes to be accredited with precisely such forms of authority.[24]

In recognising this condition, Butt initiates the discourse that this thesis continues. By bridging academic disciplines this thesis presents new philosophical conditions within which to view art, and works of art that present new conditions within which to consider philosophy. While the relationship between Beuys and Adorno is presented so as to introduce these conditions, the studies of Kiefer's *Notung* and Darboven's *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* serve to transcend disciplinary fragmentation altogether, shaping what has, for the intents of this thesis, come to be regarded as a *post-philosophical* realm. In its literal sense, the term refers to a realm of cognition where current philosophical pursuits are superceded, and non-philosophical (that is, according to its own traditions and definitions) pursuits enter the fray to contribute to as unyet recognised realm of cognition. Within this realm, epistemic potential is retrieved from within the work of art, correcting the hermeneutic dominance maintained by the traditions of philosophy. This imbalance in the relationship between art and philosophy can only be corrected if there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the elucidation of a concept can first be achieved, and then gain benefit from, its immersion in visual, creative terms. Adorno's aesthetic philosophy, not coincidentally, revealed itself as the perfect initial study for such an

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[23] Gavin Butt "Introduction. The Paradoxes of Criticism" *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance* Gavin Butt (ed.) (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2007) p. 1.

[24] ibid. p. 4.

endeavour, largely because of the perceived need for a 'critical retrieval' of his work as explained by, among others, Lambert Zuidervaart.[25]

Zuidervaart is at the forefront of the drive to reinstate Adorno at the vanguard of contemporary aesthetic philosophy. His particularist aesthetic readings are complemented by Simon Jarvis' substantial four-volume collection of essays, each examining contemporary implications for Adorno's theory.[26] All either implicitly or explicitly suggests the re-integration of Adorno's work within the contemporary philosophical consideration of (most notably, but not exclusively) culture. This thesis contributes to the pursuit of this goal by integrating the cognitive foundation of the Beuysian aesthetic, and the resulting work of art, with Adorno's theory. While the thesis develops this integration so as to move beyond Beuys and Adorno towards its proposed *post-philosophical* positioning of the work of art, it also demonstrates the ways in which we might retrieve critical understanding from a work of philosophy *via* a work of art.

Finally, attention must be drawn to the thesis' deliberate emphasis on the term *work* when discussing art and philosophy. The term as constitutive of the artistic and philosophical means *and* ends necessarily serves to identify the dual concerns addressed within this thesis. Thus, beyond the objective representation (*the artwork*), *work* as the action underpinning the creative process (*the artist working*) is presented as central to bringing the pursuits together. Nicholas Bourriaud is one contemporary theorist extracting meaning from this *work* by viewing the object as constitutive of this action:

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[25] See: Lambert Zuidervaart. *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997) and *Social Philosophy after Adorno* (Cambridge, U.K.. Cambridge University Press, 2007) and *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991).

[26] Simon Jarvis (ed) *Theodor W. Adorno: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2007) Those most relevant to this thesis are. Herbert Schnadelbach "The contemporary relevance of the Dialectic of Enlightenment", Georgina Born "Against negation, for a politics of cultural production: Adorno, aesthetics, the social", Peter Burger "Adorno's anti-avant-gardism"; Deborah Cook "Reassessing the culture industry"; Rodolphe Gasche "The theory of natural beauty and its evil star: Kant, Hegel, Adorno", Tom Huhn "The movement of mimesis: Heidegger's `Origin of the Work of Art' in relation to Adorno and Lyotard", Robert Hullot-Kentor "Back to Adorno"; Peter Osborne "Adorno and the metaphysics of modernism: the problem of a `postmodern' art"; Richard Wolin "Utopia, mimesis, and reconciliation: a redemptive critique of Adorno's Aesthetic Theory" and Lambert Zuidervaart's contribution to the collection, the final essay "History, art, and truth."

> ...the contemporary work of art does not position itself as the termination point of the 'creative process' (a 'finished product' to be contemplated) but as a site of navigation, a portal, a generator of activities.[27]

Bourriaud's description of the interaction between visual art and philosophy from conception to exhibition in this passsage serves as a prelude to the thesis' final section.

In surveying the texts outlined in this brief review, it became evident that as an artist (engaging with conceptual and practical formation of works of art incorporating multiple aesthetic and stylistic representations, and, importantly, informed by multiple philosophical themes and references) I was in a rare position to present a detailed, first-person account of the process of creating a single work of art as a philosophical investigation from conception to exhibition. To manage this somewhat radical departure from the thesis as presented thus far, the explication of the work (*I Make Myself (sic) 1996/I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008*) is contextualised as an exploration into the cognitive and creative procedures relevant to both the work of art and the work of philosophy. This account comes at the end of the last section of the thesis, which is divided into two parts.

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The first section is largely dedicated to Joseph Beuys and his artwork *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, while the second part pursues the thesis' objective via studies of Anselm Kiefer's painting *Notung*, Hanne Darboven's installation *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, and the author's own installation work, *I Make Myself (sic) 1996/I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008*. Each study is further divided into sections proffering extended analyses of critical features of each work's production, exhibition and interpretation. Depending on the work in question, the conditions under which the respective production, exhibition and interpretation of the work is considered vary. The following is a simple overview of the thesis structure, outlining each section as components of a strategically designed, progressive study.

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[27] Nicholas Bourriaud. *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay· How Art Reprograms the World* Trans. Jeanne Herman (Berlin: Lukas & Sternberg, 2005) p. 19.

The first part of the thesis (titled "Joseph Beuys") is divided into four chapters. The introductory chapter outlines Beuys's theory and practice as stemming from his wartime experience and subsequent period of traumatic depression. Constructed with an amalgam of historical, biographical and psychoanalytical profiling of the artist and his work, this chapter explains how Beuys came to see the pursuits as inextricably bound (adopting Beuys's own terminology: *Lebenslauf/Werklauf*) to both the critical dissection of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* and the work's integration with the philosophical engagement with *Vergangenheitsbewältigung.*

The second chapter of Part One ("Ideas Pre-empted: Beuys and Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*") introduces Theodor Adorno's theoretical dissection of the post-war German condition as articulated in his final, posthumously published work, *Aesthetic Theory*, and introduces the methodology with which we might consider the work of art (in this instance, *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*) alongside the work of philosophy. This chapter concentrates its attention on those passages from *Aesthetic Theory* that are enhanced by a Beuysian accompaniment. The reason for this is to demonstrate to the reader how engaging simultaneously with text and image affects philosophical perception. Although this is a modest strategy, it is one that may well extend to other works of philosophy (by Adorno, or otherwise) or other works of art (by Beuys, or otherwise). A significant part of this chapter utilises this strategy to tend to the increasing inclination towards relocating Adorno's theory in order for it to remain relevant to contemporary aesthetic philosophy.

The third chapter of Part One ("Interpretation and Reception") surveys Beuysian critique from the 1970s to the present day. It serves the dual purpose of illustrating a typical range of literature one might encounter in a quest to develop a critical review and understanding of a body of work, and of drawing the reader's attention to the critical questions surrounding Beuys's life and work.

The fourth and final chapter of Part One is a detailed study of the work *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964.* The work is encased in a glass vitrine in Room 5 of the multi-room installation *Block Beuys* in the *Hessisches Landesmuseum* in Darmstadt, Germany. The introduction to this chapter reflects on the experience of viewing the work, and is integrated with the historical background to its installation. I present this as a critical

aspect of studying a work of art, and develop this contextually variable subjective condition in each study. In order to expand on the descriptive interpretation of each of the ten, diverse elements that comprise *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, this chapter draws on the preceding chapters' insights to (re)construct certain philosophical conditions Beuys and Adorno encountered so as to integrate and fortify their respective works. By Part One's end, a holistic presentation of the thesis' strategy is complete, in readiness for the progressive turn in Part Two.

Part Two of the thesis – "Variations & Departures" – is divided into four chapters. While the introductory chapter outlines the thesis' progression and the methodological shift underpinning it, the final three chapters preserve the core objective of reading of a single work of art as a companion to a work of philosophy. A notable difference emerges; each chapter in Part Two is a more abbreviated study than was undertaken for *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*. There are two reasons for this refinement: First, the works of art selected are by artists yet to elicit the extensive critical dissection granted Beuys's works, thus limiting my resources; Second, having dedicated a substantial part of Part One to demonstrating the methodology underpinning the study, somewhat abbreviated studies seemed sufficient to in illustrate how one might undertake such research under varied conditions. Thus, as each chapter advances from the original Beuysian study (performing the 'departure' signified by the title), the thesis expands its objective.

Chapter Two is a study of Anselm Kiefer's 1973 painting *Notung*. Presenting Kiefer as a generation removed from (and understudy to) Beuys serves to distinguish the historico-cultural and political (and consequently, I argue, *aesthetic*) conditions underpinning his creative production, while positioning him as a foil to Jürgen Habermas, himself a generation removed from (and understudy to) Adorno. By explicating the divergence of their work, this chapter lays the groundwork for the conception of a *post-philosophical* condition within which the work of art might operate. Furthermore, this chapter plays an important role in expanding the objective of this thesis by considering a painting. This simultaneously broadens the thesis' scope and rejects the aforementioned dominance of conceptual art in contemporary philosophical aesthetics. Kiefer's engagement with questions of post-war German culture is explicated in three sections detailing the attic depicted in the painting (one section each detailing the representation of *space* and

subjectivity respectively) and the sword (*Notung*) portrayed as embedded in its floorboards (pointing to the Germany's cultural heritage as represented by Richard Wagner).

While the third chapter's return to the installation art 'genre' suggests a return to the methodology established in the Beuysian study, this is true only of its structure. *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* is spread across a number of rooms. Just as *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* was selected from within the expanse of the Block Beuys, so too were select works chosen from within the greater installation so as to accord with the thesis' objective of.... Beyond this similarity, *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* is significantly conceptually and aesthetically different from *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* . These differences are made explicit in the sections detailing the personal circumstances integral to its production, the viewing of the work, and, importantly, Darboven's interest in, and the work's integration with, the concept of temporality in musical composition. The chapter culminates in a detailed description and analysis of the select individual works chosen from within *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, and considers their representational singularity in post-philosophical terms.

The final chapter of Part Two takes the seemingly radical departure from the thesis' format by introducing the work of art produced by the author – *I Make Myself (sic) 1996/I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008.* Beyond the necessary qualifying remarks acknowledging certain unavoidable shifts in subjectivity (which is not entirely negative, as a first-person account certainly addresses Didi-Huberman's concerns regarding the *tone of certainty*), the chapter progresses according to the established strategy of proffering a detailed description of the conceptual origin(s), production and exhibition (and, in this case, *performance*) of the work. The availability of *certainty* in the explication of the philosophical informants to the work means that as the chapter breaks into sections detailing the 1996 performance that found form in the 2008 installation (and the six distinct 'stations' that comprise this final form), the symbiosis of concept and form becomes manifest.

In the development of this thesis, Joseph Beuys is the dominant figure whose spectre appears throughout. Each of the artists examined, however, engage philosophically, thus reinforcing the arguments that art is critical to the philosophical, or *post-philosophical* landscape.

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PART ONE – JOSEPH BEUYS

1. ENTRY

The emergence of the term *Beuysian* as a scholarly reference lends testimony to the academic seriousness with which Joseph Beuys's work is now regarded. Widely regarded as post-war Germany's most influential artist, Beuys is increasingly credited for his contribution to an array of creative and theoretical fields:

> [Studies] in Europe and America are more committed than ever before to putting together the full picture of his influence and work which encompasses art history, aesthetics, philosophy; science, medicine, psychology; music, ritual, theatre; not forgetting anthropology, anthroposophy and theology.[28]

However, such uncritical judgments disguise the greater problem ongoing and expanding reconsideration of Beuys's work engenders, particularly in English-language scholarship. When Beuys's career led him outside German culture, his persona and agenda were frequently misunderstood. Highly theoretical readings of his work within English-language literature (particularly American art theory journals) had a tendency to offer one-dimensional readings of Beuys's persona and agenda as based on particular political or spiritual currents. This section will follow the course of Beuys's life and work, before examining the critical dissection of this life and work, as entry to the critical dissection of the seven-room installation at the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt. Referred to simply as the *Block Beuys*, these seven rooms house a body of work that many consider his *magnum opus*. To combat the formidable task of writing a thesis on such a vast work, I have chosen a single piece from within, so as to limit, but more importantly, focus my attention: *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964.*

Part-way through this section I will diverge and give an account of the aesthetic philosophy of Theodor Adorno, whose *Aesthetic Theory* becomes foil to a forthcoming reading of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964.* The combined understanding of Beuys's and Adorno's respective projects, their philosophical heritage, and their reception and interpretation, will generate a unique insight into the relationship between art and philosophy, and the potential for their united consideration.

Before starting a more detailed examination of Beuys and Adorno, some disclaimers are necessary. It must be noted that the author's experience of these 'collective works' is

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[28] Friedhelm Mennekes. *Joseph Beuys: Christus DENKEN / THINKING Christ* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1996) p. 4.

limited to only English-language texts, including those translated from German. In the case of the latter, the most problematic variable is the quality of the translation. This is accentuated by the notorious complexity of the German language, as has been oft recorded, perhaps most famously by Mark Twain:

> My philological studies have satisfied me that a gifted person ought to learn English (barring spelling and pronouncing) in thirty hours, French in thirty days, and German in thirty years. It seems manifest, then, that the latter tongue ought to be trimmed down and repaired. If it is to remain as it is, it ought to be gently and reverently set aside among the dead languages, for only the dead have time to learn it.[29]

The former texts – those written in English – have their own problems. Any unfamiliarity with Beuys's peculiarly Germanic vision has a tendency to manifest itself in derision or misreading, often following contemporary critical trends, while the complexity and stylistic idiosyncrasies of Adorno's writing have led to a number of problems in the reception of translations. I will explore this aspect of the scholarship in due course, but before embarking on this dissection, I would like to point out how, in the course of writing this thesis, it became increasingly clear that – in light of difficulties with translation – certain terms would keep their German textual form. For example, when, in the thesis' infancy, a particular chapter was given the working-title, "Spirit", the Anglicised connotations became limiting when considering the expansive nature – not to mention Germanic heritage – of Beuys's 'spiritual' expression. In its place, the word *Geist* emerged, and could not be bettered. Evidence of its appropriately Beuysian connotation, can be found in the aged Germanic tradition of categorising matters of social aestheticism[30] as *geisteges*:

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[29] Mark Twain "Appendix D: That Awful German Language" *A Tramp Abroad* (First published 1880. Reprinted, London: Century, 1982) p. 231

[30] "In the German philosophical tradition, the aesthetic is the realm of the social. [Beuys's] eventual turn away from the narrow definition of the aesthetic as the science of the beautiful to encompass all of human experience was, in effect, a return to the core meaning of the aesthetic within his own and the larger Western cultural tradition." Bernice Rose "Joseph Beuys and the Language of Drawing" in Ann Temkin and Bernice Rose (eds). *Thinking Is Form* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1993) p. 73.

> ...embracing religion, science, education and the arts [and] best explained by the peculiarities of the German language, in which the term *Geist* can mean "spirit," "mind," "ghosts," "intellect," "wit," or the "creative imagination" or all of them at once.[31]

Thus *Geist*, and its family of derivatives (particularly *geisteges*, *Geistesleben*, *Geisteswissenschaften*) are used throughout the thesis.

1.1 *Lebenslauf/Werklauf*

There is an inextricable relationship between Beuys's life and work and its role in the development of his idea of an 'expanded concept of art.' Choosing a single work from within *Block Beuys* – let alone a lifetime's work – presented major obstacles. Initially, the colossal quantity of Beuys's output (exacerbated by his own expanded conceptualisation of art) loomed as an insurmountable problem. The task of then selecting a single work that most suitably represented the integratory nature of his greater work was constantly tempered by the imagined objection Beuys would have to such a method. It will become increasingly evident how this methodological problem similarly haunts the relationship the researcher has with Adorno. Despite these hurdles, the choice of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* was made.

I understand how personal taste withstands the most convincing argument; however, I feel strongly enough that this work holds value within a range of fields – in a complementary role, a supplementary role or as a work in its own right – so that even the merely historically or aesthetically curious (if not the outright skeptic) should find interest. Furthermore, *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* 'addresses' many of the premises presented herein; its fragmentary construction and melancholy aesthetic is indicative of the Beuysian integration of concept and form that a range of academics and art theorists/critics have deliberated over. The importance of Beuys's 'reception history' becomes evident in the dissection of the particularist readings of Joseph Beuys's work provided in this section. I have provided these to build an objective (or perhaps, more accurately, *intersubjective*) platform upon which to shape the consideration of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* in the next.

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[31] John F Moffitt. *Occultism in Avant-Garde Art: The Case of Joseph Beuys* (Ann Arbor: Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1988) p. 174.

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This section's title is borrowed from the title of Beuys's own, idiosyncratic *curriculum vitae.* From its opening entry,

> 1921 – Kleve. Exhibition of a wound drawn together with plaster

to its last,

> 1964 – Beuys recommends that the Berlin Wall be heightened by 5cm (better proportions!)

we enter the discourse of Beuys's charlatan self-mythologisation; the audacity to translate his own birth into primal, anti-modern and anti-aesthetic imagery, while playfully turning the physical and symbolic division of post-war Germany into aesthetic, rather than moral quandary. Beuys is neither the first nor the only to use the wound as metaphor for the depressive German post-war condition,[32] nor is he the only to playfully toy with its laden symbolism. However his all-encompassing aesthetic and theoretical project imbues this representation with particular qualities.

The readings discussed herein offer detailed critical response to Beuys's work, and provide interpretive material to feed this thesis, however, it remains essential for the Beuysian scholar to complement her or his involvement with the intricacies of Beuys's theoretical realm with an ongoing engagement with the work of art itself. To define Beuys's work – be it in artistic, political or spiritual terms – it was requisite that this section be a foundation only for the engagement with Beuys's artwork, rather than a maintenance of focus on, or expansion of, his theory. There are two reasons for this: firstly (and most simply) Joseph Beuys is recognised primarily – and popularly – as an artist. For his vision to be interpreted for a wider audience, it is important that a correct and integral reading of his theory be proposed in his artistic terms. Secondly, we must understand Beuys's transformative method, in which concept becomes form, and recognise that:

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[32] Relative to this thesis one might consider Adorno's use of the term in *Aesthetic Theory* (Originally published as *Asthetische Theorie* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970) Trans Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997). pp. 61, 89.

> Beuys's work of teaching, leading and therapy was above all directed on to the subject it transformed, and as such was carried out on the self. Beuys, the architect of the self...was at one and the same time the moving spirit, a constituent part of a huge object *reconstruction*, that of *linking* the world.[33]

This concept is not only central to reading Beuys's social theory and sculpture (as defined by his 'Social Sculpture' theory), but is a theme present in many of the critical trends with which Beuys has been alternately associated. Among many, three clear examples emerge:

1. Beuys's *Politik* – be it read as social, national or ecological – which expresses the transformation of thought into art as a political form or political action.
2. Beuys's shamanic expression, which depicts the transformation of spirit into art as a healing form or healing action (sometimes in an ecstatic state) and recognises this as a creative transformation to societal healing.
3. Beuys's borrowing of theological notions (eg, transsubstantiation, baptism, the Godhead) as reference to the potential physicality of spirit.

Irrespective of one's faith in his utopianism, Beuys is openly acknowledged as among the most important and influential artists working in post-war Europe, as much for the ideological dimension of his work as for his immense body of sculptural assemblage, collage, drawing, painting and performance. As a founding member of *Die Grunen* (the German Green party) Beuys contributed to the development of one of the world's first, and, ultimately, most politically successful and impacting ecological parties. In addition to his participation in political ecological activism (from his "successful effort to save a threatened forest tract in Düsseldorf in 1971"[34] to his unsuccessful candidacies for *die Grünen* in the European parliament elections in 1979, and the Bundestag elections in 1980[35]) his thoughts on ecological matters have been considered by an array of scholars

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[33] Alain Borer. *The Essential Joseph Beuys* (London. Thames and Hudson, 1996) p 28.

[34] See: David Adams. "Joseph Beuys· Pioneer of a Radical Ecology" *Art Journal* (Summer, 1992) pp 26-34

[35] For the European Parliament election, in June 1979, the Party received 3.2% of the vote, 1 8% short of the 5% required for representation. Beuys drew 1 5% of the vote as candidate for the Party in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia in the Bundestag elections of October 1980, again, not enough for representation. For greater detail on Beuys's political activism, see Lukas Beckmann "The Causes Lie in the Future" Gene Ray (ed.) *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy* (New York/Sarasota: Distributed Art Publishers, Inc./The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 2001) pp. 91-111.

from a diverse disciplinary background.[36] As Professor of Sculpture at the Düsseldorf Academy, Beuys developed and implemented radical pedagogical change that continues to fuel theory to this day.[37] Even Beuys's contemplation on matters of medicinal holism – starting with his 'rehabilitation' at the hands of his Tatars in Crimea – is stirring interest among medical scholars. This particular aspect of Beuys's thought was first addressed in Axel Murken's 1979 book, *Joseph Beuys und die Medizin*,[38] but was more recently addressed in Y. Michael Barilan's 2004 article, "Medicine Through the Artist's Eyes: before, during, and after the Holocaust" published in the quarterly *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* and Gunter Wolf's 2000 article "'Show Your Wound' Medicine and the Work of Joseph Beuys" published in the American College of Physicians' quarterly *Annals of Internal Medicine*.[39] Barilan outlines the background to, and essence of Beuys's theory:

> One key component in this story is that Beuys was fatally wounded by a technology-intensive war of "civilization" and was saved by the "natural" remedies of "uncivilized" nomads...Beuys's art points a recriminatory finger at technology and bureaucracy and puts its trust in holistic, cosmic energies of healing and rejuvenation. Beuys does not question the goals of medicine, but the means by which biomedicine pursues them. He ignores the baneful ways ends might influence means – as if the elimination of the retarded, epileptics and others was not carried out by the Nazis in medical institutions, by doctors and nurses in the name of health, purity and cleanliness.[40]

Thus, beyond being knowledgeable of philosophical traditions (not only those of Europe, but, as his fascinating engagement with the Dalai Lama[41] attests, beyond) these multiple roles meant Beuys was engaged in, and simultaneously contributing to the

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[36] From Adams' "Joseph Beuys: Pioneer of a Radical Ecology" pp. 26-34 to Matthew Gandy's "Contradictory Modernities: Conceptions of Nature in the Art of Joseph Beuys and Gerhard Richter" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (Vol. 87, no 4, 1997) pp. 636-59.

[37] See Gregory L. Ulmer's monograph *Applied Grammatology: Post(E)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys* (Baltimore; London. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) and Karen Wright's essay "Student and Teacher: an interview with curator and former Beuys student Dr Martin Hentschel" *Modern Painters – International Arts and Culture* (February, 2005) pp. 63-67.

[38] Axel Hinrich Murken and Joseph Beuys. *Joseph Beuys Und Die Medizin* (Munster: Coppenrath, 1979)

[39] Y. Michael Barilan. "Medicine Through the Artist's Eyes: before, during, and after the Holocaust" *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* (Vol. 47 no 1, 2004) pp. 110-134. Gunter Wolf "'Show Your Wound' Medicine and the Work of Joseph Beuys" *Annals of Internal Medicine* (Vol. 133 no 11, December 5, 2000) pp. 927-31. Also note Dieter Arnold's peculiarly titled "*If it Weren't for These Pictures...* - Joseph Beuys. The Pre- and Perinatal Aspects and Their Transformation in *Lebenslauf/Werklauf*" *The International Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Medicine* (Vol. 8, no. 1, June, 1996) pp. 47-56

[40] op. cit., Barilan. p. 112.

[41] See Louwrien Wijers *Writing as Sculpture: 1978-1987* (London: Academy Editions, 1998).

philosophical consideration of Germany and Europe's post-war condition. That Willi Brandt and Lech Wałensa held audience with the charismatic artist should be testimony enough to his influence beyond the confines of the gallery. Furthermore the import Beuys placed on the location and construction of an artwork places him amidst the still developing but increasingly important theory and discourse surrounding the relationship between art and museums.[42] With this in mind, the shifting readings presented feed an integral, revisionary reading of Beuys's vision and aesthetic as present in a single artwork.

1.2 The shaping of Beuys's post-war trauma

Beuys was born in 1921 in Krefeld – less than thirty kilometres from Germany's border with The Netherlands – into a traditional Rhenish Catholic family. In his youth Beuys gave no impression of the artistry ahead, preferring the study of medicine, until military service interrupted any such plans. Beuys entered the *Wehrmacht* as a radio operator, before becoming a combat fighter in the *Luftwaffe*. Beuys's role in the German war effort was not only a matter of psychological significance in his later life; the physical repercussions of his plane crash on the Crimean Peninsula in 1943 were critical:

> [He] was hurled from the cockpit on impact and pinned under the tail...Beuys had suffered a double fracture at the base of his skull; he had shrapnel all over, only a portion of which could later be removed. He had broken his ribs, legs and arms. His hair was singed to the roots, his nose smashed.[43]

This was not only a physically critical experience for Beuys; it marked the dawn of Beuys's life as an artist. In his questionable recollection (or, some would argue, 'self-mythologisation'[44]) Beuys described the Tatar nomads, who, upon rescuing him from the wreckage, nursed him to health with a remedy of (smearing his body with) animal fat and (wrapping him in) felt. Though Beuys's own reflections on his wartime experience are mixed, the ongoing and repetitive use of fat and felt as sculptural materials are cleverly bound to this experience/myth.

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[42] An excellent example of Beuys considered within this field of inquiry is Charity Scribner's article "Object, Relic, Fetish, Thing: Joseph Beuys and the Museum" *Critical Inquiry* (Vol 29, 2003) pp. 634-649.

[43] Heiner Stachelhaus. *Joseph Beuys* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1991) p. 22.

[44] See Benjamin Buchloh. "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol – Preliminary notes for a Critique" *Artforum* (January 18, 1980) pp. 36-43

Between 1947 and 1952 Beuys studied sculpture at the Staatliche Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, becoming the 'master pupil' of sculptor Ewald Mataré until 1954, when he started to exhibit his own work. These formative years of exhibiting coincided with deep traumatic depression resulting from both the physical and emotional damage of the war experience. Beuys's sculptural works became thinly veiled religious studies, inspired by a peculiar hybrid of Steinerian anthroposophy, Eurasian shamanism and primitive Christianity.[45]

(Fig. 1) Joseph Beuys *Cross, 1950* (1950) Bronze, 17.8 x 13 x 0.9 cm. Collection Schmela, Düsseldorf.

Among his earliest works from this period is *Cross, 1950* (Fig. 1). This bronze-cast cruciform is so roughly hewn, that on first impressions it might be mistaken for a pre-modern, or early-Christian relic. Indeed, in the context of Beuys's life and work, works like these are often dismissed, mistakenly, as simple, ironic symbols that represent the paradoxical status of Christian morality. Christian Germans – Beuys included – were being labeled (if not self-acknowledged), *en masse*, as being complicit (if not active) in the perpetration of heinous crimes against humanity. It was a dominant and conflicting theme in the aftermath of the war; however, against the backdrop of the concurrent,

[45] See Andrew Wear. *Unity in Diversity: Reading the Sculpture of Joseph Beuys.* (Honours Dissertation, 2002) pp. 23-28.

extreme ideological and theological re-imagining, Beuys's imagery appeared immediately incongruous:

> The archaic motifs and...style maintain a powerful, if puzzling, anachronism...Beuys's desire to step out of time and place reflects his position in a context that offered no real sense of either. During the 1950s German culture had yet to recover its foothold from more than a decade of Nazi dictate; German identity was being questioned, as collective ambivalence over the recent past effectively blocked access to an older tradition.[46]

In later years, Beuys spent a great deal of time discussing the theology and symbolism of Christianity – particularly Catholicism – with Jesuit priest Friedhelm Mennekes. There will be a more extensive reading of Beuys's discussion with Mennekes later in this section, but as a prelude, it is interesting to note the following observations by Mennekes:

> Through the immanent energy of the Cross, imbued in it by Christ, human beings can recapture their lost sense of self. The halving of this symbol points towards the task of mediation. This means reuniting the rationally structured with the intuitively chaotic, the conceptually fixed ideas of modernity with the fluidity of the mythical, the rigidity of enlightenment with the dynamism of religion.[47]

Mennekes's language – "lost sense of self"; "mediation" – reintroduces the reunifying thema. This understanding drives Mennekes' most conclusive statement regarding the Cross:

> For him, it is an extraordinarily complex sign that reaches far beyond pure Christian symbolism. One can view the cross as a symbol of memory, or as a magical and devotional symbol, or in a more scientific sense as the central axis of a coordinate system. It represents the dividing line and the link between antiquity and Christianity, and is thus an intermediary in the meeting of two world views...*The cross is the symbol for the conflict between man and his own idea.*[48]

Naturally, Mennekes emerges as the one most likely to contribute to any discourse surrounding the cross and Christian symbolism in general. When, in interview with Beuys, Mennekes concludes, "I think one of the virtues of the Jesuits is that they have no

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[46] op.cit , Temkin & Rose. p. 30

[47] op cit., Mennekes. p. 128.

[48] ibid., pp. 104-106.

illusions about the church,"[49] he reveals the Jesuitical essence that contributes to his understanding of Beuys's ideas. Thus Mennekes' manages to peel the institutionalised elements of Christianity away from Beuys and share his *Christ*-ian notion.

Beuys, like so many confronting the contradictions of, and disillusionment with institutionalised religion, questioned this 'blocked access' by reconsidering symbols that had become ideologically laden. Like his one-time student (and eventual critically-acclaimed 'heir') Anselm Kiefer, Beuys understood how a culture devoid of symbolic tradition and reference would be, in denying itself the simple and most primitive representational means, at risk of losing sight of the very trajectory that led to its decay. The contemplative depths Beuys reached in his persistent drive to work through his, and, consequently, Germany's trauma, are testament to the seriousness with which he approached the problem. How he did so is as important historically and intellectually as it is aesthetically. In taking up "the heritage of Dada found particularly in the work of Kurt Schwitters"[50] and imbuing his constructions with an austere metaphysic, Beuys became an aesthetic and intellectual precursor to artists as diverse as Robert Rauschenberg, Bruce Nauman, Nam June Paik and Matthew Barney.[51]

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[49] To which Beuys responds, "Yes they stand apart in any case. They have always been suspect and continually suspected by the Pope!" ibid., p. 78.

[50] op. cit., Temkin. p. 42

[51] See Nancy Spector, *Matthew Barney & Joseph Beuys: All in the Present Must Be Transformed* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2007).

(Fig. 2) Joseph Beuys. *Crucifixion 1962-1963* (1963) Wood, nails, wire, thread, needle, twine, two plastic bottles and newspaper, Oil colour (Braunkreuz) and plaster, 42.5 x 19 x 15 cm. Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart.

Crucifixion 1962-63 (Fig. 2) is an example of this critical phase of questioning in Beuys's development. In her essay "Joseph Beuys: Life Drawing," Ann Temkin warns the viewer not to be dissuaded by the assemblage's "crude appearance [that] belies Beuys's exacting

choices for the materials."[52] This clear shift beyond the primitive significance of a work like *Cross, 1950* requires, indeed, demands closer attention:

> ...the acid-encrusted hospital blood-storage bottles...take the place of Mary Magdalene and John the Baptist. The three squares of newspaper, atop each bottle and in front of the cross, bear close reading; in respect they, too, are descendants of the newspaper fragments used in Cubist *papier collés*...The text accompanying Mary Magdalene is an engagement notice, suggesting her holy marriage. The excerpt over John includes the word *guilt*, which alludes to the Baptist's call for repentance and moral purification. The text of the fragment on the central beam is initially more enigmatic: an article from the newspaper's financial pages, it refers to the Zentralbank and the fluctuation of the pound. This text brings to the subject of the Crucifixion the principle of an economy and the circulation of capital therein.[53]

Temkin continues by presenting a variation on Mennekes' understanding:

> Herein rests the connection to the Christian theme of Crucifixion, for it is this form of capital that Beuys described as the gift of Christ to man: a mandate to act freely and to assume responsibility for one's own fate. Beuys centred spirituality and, concomitantly, creativity within the individual. Christian symbolism underscored for him a faith in man's own creative potential, a potential that must replace money as society's concept of capital.[54]

Any author's interpretation of any work will always be subject to query, however extensive analysis of Beuys's life and work universally acknowledges the transubstantialism dominant in Beuys's work. Beuys not only recognised the Christian notion of the transference of spirit to form; he later borrowed it, and translated it as the transference of concept to form. Despite differing interpretations, Mennekes and Temkin both recognise this transferral as critical for realising Beuys's 'expanded concept of art.' As a unitary work assembled from disparate thought systems – religious, economic and aesthetic – *Crucifixion 1962-63* typically represents the utopianism for which Beuys became recognised, and, often, criticised. In time, however, Beuys's intense association with Christian symbolism gave way to more playful representation. The small, untitled diptych (Fig. 3) is made up of two identical Catholic holy-cards depicting Jesus. On each of these cards, in his distinctive scrawl, Beuys has written; on one, *The inventor of the steam engine* and on the other, *The inventor of electricity.*

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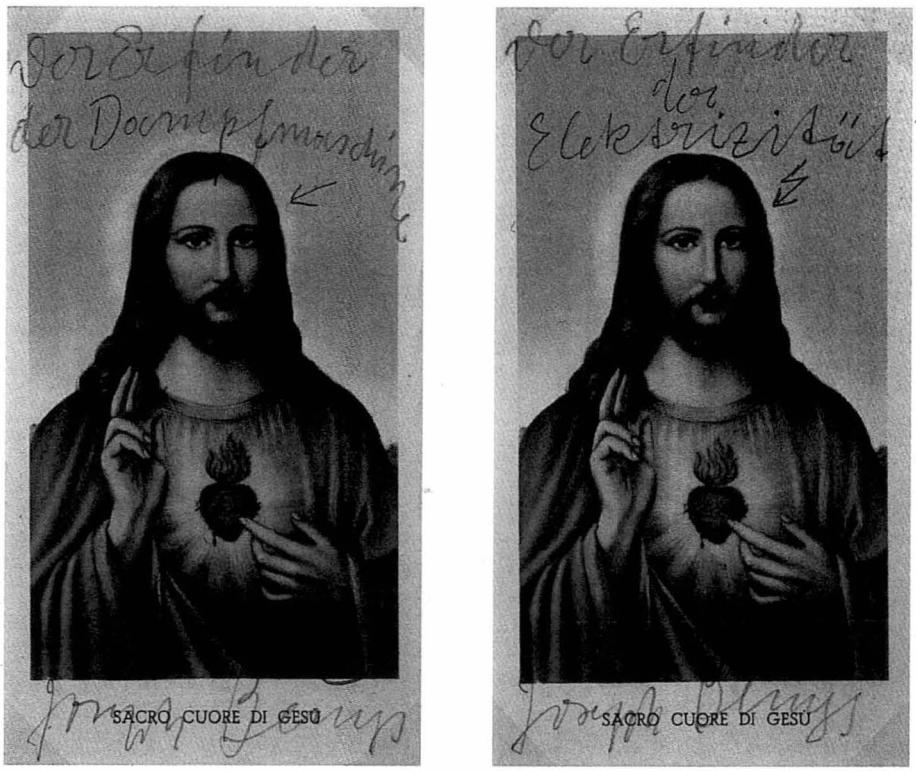
[52] op. cit., Temkin. p. 42.

[53] ibid.

[54] ibid. p. 43.



(Fig. 3) Joseph Beuys. *No title [The inventor of the steam engine]* and *No title [The inventor of electricity]* (1971) Pencil on card, each 10.5 x 6 cm. Collection Lucio Amelio, Naples.

All the while Beuys was working with Christian symbolism he was simultaneously engaging with the writing and teachings of Rudolph Steiner (1861–1925). Considered foremost for his role in anthroposophical movements and esotericism, Steiner has been variably considered as a philosopher, literary scholar, pedagogue and architect. Beuys was drawn to Steiner's esoteric philosophy, a fusion of European transcendentalism and Eastern Theosophy. However, despite the significant impact of Steiner's teachings on Beuys in these early years, it tends to be over-stated among critics as a central influence. Certainly, Beuys's naïvely brushed and drawn images ("...a menagerie of swans, stags, elks and bees, all dense in symbolic meaning, German as well as Celtic, Christian or Greco-Roman"[55]) became iconised in a decidedly *anti*-modern aesthetic and resemble, if not completely mimic, aspects of Steiner's own visual work. Beuys's recurring theoretical and sculptural interest in bees, wax and honey is perhaps the strongest Steinerian reference. This relationship was highlighted again recently in the exhibition *Joseph Beuys*

[55] ibid., p.34.

& Rudolf Steiner: Imagination, Inspiration, Intuition at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, in 2007-2008:

> Rudolf Steiner's writings on politics, economics and intellectual freedom exerted an impact upon Beuys. In particular, Beuys' theory of 'social sculpture' reflects the influence of Steiner in its insistence that creativity should be applied to all aspects of human endeavour. Building upon Steiner's concept of 'denkbilder' or 'thought drawings', Beuys used chalk on board to communicate to his audience the basic principles of social sculpture – freedom, direct democracy and sustainable economic forms.[56]

Nevertheless, I suspect that the ongoing and frequent consideration of Beuys as a Steinerian makes for simple classification rather than accuracy. After all, there is a noticeable diminution of Steinerian reference (with the exception of the ongoing use of blackboards in his teachings/actions) as Beuys turned to new, more socially active pursuits. This period of Beuys's work preceded and pre-empted a political turn, during which time activism and performance overcame the more contemplative and reflective works discussed. In reading this shift, we can observe how Beuys's progressive, radical turn could only come into fruition after a regressive and spiritually rudimentary stage:

> The primitivizing strain within German Expressionism provided a legitimate context for Beuys's use of regression as a tool...it was premodern, nineteenth-century Romanticism with its nostalgia for medievalism...This is what made Beuys look so peculiar, so radical, while look so puzzlingly, uncomfortably old-fashioned at the same time.[57]

Much has been made of Beuys's early, developmental years; more often than not couched in negative terms. For many, the primitive qualities of Beuys's theology and its entanglement with Steinerian anthroposophy were fodder for those critics demanding greater aesthetic sophistication. While I concur with certain critiques, I prefer, for the benefit of this thesis, to focus on the period of Beuys's work in which he produced works that *are* at a level of sophistication and complexity so as to be considered in the same light as the philosophy being produced. In time, Beuys's political and ecological activism grew so as to fuse idea with action as art, shaping the impression of Beuys as the

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[56] Author not credited. Taken from abstract for *Joseph Beuys & Rudolf Steiner: Imagination, Inspiration, Intuition.* National Gallery of Victoria online resource (http://www ngv.vic.gov.au/beuysandsteiner/index.html) Accessed 23:19, July 6, 2008.

[57] op. cit., Rose. p. 100.

'father of performance art.'[58] However it was Beuys's intention, by way of fusing methods and media, to demolish this kind of categorization that he considered aligned with academic discipline, preferring to see creativity as an all-encompassing solution to society's ills. Beuys's divisive dismissal from the Dusseldorf Academy in 1972 – the incident behind one of Beuys's most enduring actions and images – seemed to trigger an engagement with political activism. Whether engaging in political dialogue concerning (both the possibilities for, and risks to) democratic politics at a table adorned only by a single red rose (as documented in the 'multiples'[59] *We Won't Do It without the Rose* and *Rose for Direct Democracy* from the 1972 Documenta V in Kassel[60]) or creating a monumental commentary on the significance of ecological politics by planting 7000 oak trees paired with 7000 basalt columns (in 1982, *7000 Oaks* project at Documenta VII), Beuys's projects expanded beyond the confines of the art institutions. *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* serves as a critical juncture between the two phases of Beuys's work presented thus far; an exit from his traumatic depression, and an entry to his political activism.

Thus presenting Beuys's development as an artist is important, as the relationship between his psychological condition and his aesthetic and creative choices assists our forming of an understanding of the man as artist. However it is not until Beuys starts to conceive this active, constructive reconciliation over inhibitive melancholy that engaging with Theodor Adorno's philosophy proves worthwhile.

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[58] Sound artist Zane Trow's list of 5 most important performance artists named Beuys as number 1, with Trow describing him as "...the father of performance art." "The Deep End" *ABC Radio National* Friday, September 30, 2005. 2·55pm.

[59] Any works created by Beuys for extensive or mass circulation (postcards, posters, objects) are referred to as 'multiples.' For examples of Beuys's multiples, see *Joseph Beuys, multiples : catalogue raisonne multiples and prints, 1965-80* Jorg Schellman and Bernd Kluser (eds) Trans Caroline Tisdall (New York: New York University Press, 1980)

[60] *Documenta* is a contemporary art exhibition held every 5 years in the German (formerly West German) city of Kassel. The first exhibition was held in 1955.

2. IDEAS PRE-EMPTED?

BEUYS, AND ADORNO'S *AESTHETIC THEORY*

Here I will defer, and weave through Beuys's development a concurrent philosophical tendency that is integral to this thesis' premise. The dominant presence of Beuys in this thesis determines my decision, here, to introduce the philosophy of Theodor Adorno. Before entering into the intricacies of Beuys's later work and thought, I continue with the counter-premise that insight into Adorno's aesthetic theory proffers a richer investigation of the Beuysian aesthetic. For the remainder, I propose *vice versa.*

Despite, or indeed *because* of the difference (most notably in the transition from contemplation to representation) Beuys's art serves as a fascinating foil to Adorno's thought and method. It is by no means unprecedented to counterbalance a philosophical 'movement' with an art 'movement'; one might, for example, summon the visions of French and Spanish surrealism as a counterpart to the Freudian interpretation of Fascism.[61] However, the tendency to team creative and theoretical method in this manner has, as its main drawback, an inherent *sameness.* Beuys's dominance of the German (and, arguably, European) art-world, and his lingering appeal, is curious for its 'peculiar, radical yet uncomfortably old-fashioned' structure. 'Allowed' to break free of the ideologically determined aesthetic of socialist realism and/or fascist monumentalism, a newly liberated aesthetic realm opened, for artists and theorists alike. I suggest that the *difference* Beuys brings to the regeneration of German post-war thought may deepen our understanding of this time. His realisation of post-war trauma and decay is evidence that it was far from triumphant liberation.

Naturally, any monograph on post-war German thought will detail the work of the Frankfurt School. The school's most oft-quoted theorists – notably Adorno, and Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse – all worked, in one sense or another, towards a re-evaluation of the 'enlightenment project' in reaction to the ideological caesura carved by the years of German nationalism before the wretched finality of the Holocaust. This re-evaluation was dominated by observance of the

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[61] See Michael J Szollosy's review of Mark Edmunson's *The Death of Sigmund Freud. Fascism, Psychoanalysis and Fundamentalism The British Journal of Psychiatry* (Volume 193, 2008) pp 84-85.

production and consumption of culture, and the morality therein. This revelation was most famously defined by Adorno, who stated: "after Auschwitz, to write poetry is barbaric."[62]

The importance of this project in the years leading up to the Second World War became outright dominance on their return from exile after the Second World War. Germany's ideological, cultural and political *mélange* stirred the Frankfurt School as it did Joseph Beuys. Likewise, both suffered the misfortune of being turned upon, not only by their natural enemies from the Right, but from within, by disillusioned activists from the Left. Perhaps one of the most symbolically celebrated cases of the potency of this attack is Adorno's own death, which by all accounts was hastened by his experience with student protest in the midst of a lecture:

> On 22 April 1969, at the beginning of his last lecture course, matters came to a head with an incident that profoundly shook Adorno. Two male students mounted the platform and insisted that Adorno publicly criticize himself for calling the police to clear the students from an occupation of the Institute for Social Research and for participating in legal proceedings against a former student, Hans-Jurgen Krahl, who was *cause celebre* of the radical left at the time...He was then surrounded by three women students who covered him in flowers and bared their breasts while acting out some sort of erotic performance...Teddie escaped the lecture hall in a state of desperate anxiety. Adorno was never able to resume his lectures.[63]

That Beuys, as Professor of Monumental Sculpture at the Staatliche Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, had been the chief protagonist in precisely the kind of activism targeting Adorno – albeit with a little more aesthetic *finesse*, if not subtlety – might be at odds with efforts to present a harmonious marriage of *the textual* and *the visual* in this instance. Moreover, Beuys's Christian heritage and wartime national service allowed him some luxury of staidness, while Adorno's Jewish heritage and proclaimed Marxian ideals forced exile from Germany. Needless to say, these differences are significant; and, though I will continue to point out difference as a significant evaluative key, I cannot help but draw Beuys and Adorno together on common philosophical ground, or as crossing the same philosophical territory in their relative attempts to come to terms with the brutality of

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[62] Theodor Adorno "Cultural Criticism and Society" (1949) *Prisms* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1981). Also, consider Lisa Saltzmann *Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): "Out of context even in its original context, later qualified and regretted, Adorno's statement has nevertheless come to function as a moral and aesthetic dictate for the post-war era." p 17

[63] Simon Critchly *The Book of Dead Philosophers* (New York: Vintage, 2008) p. 246.

this era. This philosophical ground was the seedbed of the historical project referred to as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or, 'the struggle to come to terms with the past,' and grew from this first-generation Frankfurt School's critical re-evaluation of modernity. In this generation of Frankfurt School thought, dissecting the transformation and malfunction of the Enlightenment project in the hands of Nazism involved an introspective turn on the path of German philosophy and culture.[64] Though the generational, ideological and cultural-political shift that occurred at the end of the 1960s signaled the emergence of the responsive pragmatism that gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s, the sort of political activism that troubled Adorno marked the cusp. Already, we are familiar with the regressive, spiritual exploration that pre-empted Beuys's involvement with this activism; yet Adorno's rigorous treatment of post-war (and, to a lesser extent for this thesis' benefit, pre-war) culture sits so suitably as counter to Beuys's work. Thus, as a prelude to this thesis' investigation into Beuys's political life and work, I would like to look into Theodor Adorno's posthumously published work, *Aesthetic Theory*.

2.1 Experiencing *Aesthetic Theory*

Like the *Block Beuys*, *Aesthetic Theory* is so vast, and has been so academically dissected, that it would be futile and disingenuous to present any abbreviated summary. However, for a blunt encyclopaedic entry, Adorno's contribution is perhaps best summarised here:

> Four topics in Adorno's writings are of particular relevance to contemporary aesthetics and cultural theory: (1) his critique of the culture industry (2) autonomy in the arts, (3) the aesthetics of nature, and (4) the status of philosophical aesthetics.[65]

The contrasting philosophical and artistic responses to Nazism Thus, like *Block Beuys*, my inquiries into *Aesthetic Theory* are defined and focused. The relevance to Beuys's work in the chapter titled 'On the categories of the ugly, the beautiful and technique' has been decisive in this task.

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[64] A good explication of this historical trajectory can be gleaned from Ronald Grimsley. "Kierkegaard and Leibniz" *Journal of the History of Ideas* (Volume 26, no 3, July - September, 1965) pp. 383-396.

[65] Michael Kelly (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) p.17.

Any research into post-war aesthetic philosophy will inevitably unearth the same, dominant handful of thinkers. Location and circumstance certainly determine encounters with primary and secondary texts, but many will – as I have – noted the pre-eminence of Theodor Adorno, and his work *Aesthetic Theory*. This pre-eminence is countered by French philosophical aesthetics, with Derrida, Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, Lyotard and Lacan (to name a few) all writing extensively on the subject and/or exerting great influence on its role in contemporary thought. Both traditions have fed an Anglo-American body of aesthetic philosophy dominated for some time by (among others) Frederic Jameson, Arthur C. Danto and Terry Eagleton. However, the axis around which Adorno and Beuys work naturally draws them together herein. Furthermore, as one of the most vexed thinkers of his time (and beyond), Adorno, and his work's reception, shares certain qualities with Beuys. I would like to devote some text to Adorno's thoughts on aesthetic philosophy after 1945 before adopting the chapter 'On the categories of the ugly, the beautiful and technique' as the philosophical key to unlocking the Beuysian aesthetic. Before returning, with this insight, to the path of Beuys's work, I will pointedly discuss the recent reactivation of, and renewed enchantment with, Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory;* for it is in what Lambert Zuidervaart calls a 'critical retrieval'[66] that space looms for Beuys's contribution, forging an enriched understanding of this critical period and thought.

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Let us, then, investigate the new aesthetic condition, and consider the troubled enchantment with Adorno. Somewhat a victim of his own demands, Adorno's work ebbs and flows in influence. From the heights of his elevation (alongside Horkheimer, Benjamin and Marcuse) to a kind of philosophical superstardom, Adorno suffered a posthumous decline. It was not until 1984 that a translation of *Asthetische Theorie* from German to English appeared, and by many accounts[67], this somewhat flawed translation

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[66] Lambert Zuidervaart. *Social Philosophy after Adorno* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p 6.

[67] "Adorno's sense that staying [in the United States] would have impossibly burdened his work was confirmed long after the fact by the first English translation of *Aesthetic Theory* in 1984 The publisher, partially against the will of the translator, discarded the book's form as a superstitiously imposed impediment that would only stymie the book's consumption Diametrically opposed to the course the book took in its various drafts in Adorno's own hands, a process that led in the final version to the rejection of the division of the book into chapters, the 1984 translation arrived on bookstore shelves divided into numbered chapters with main headings and sub-headings inserted in the text." Robert Hullot-Kerner. Translators Introduction, *Aesthetic Theory.* p. xiii.

failed to engage the Anglophile philosophical community in any fervent reconsideration of his aesthetic philosophy. This was further compounded by the generational shift away from the immediate post-war concerns of *victim* and *perpetrator* respectively, into the children-of *victim* and children-of *perpetrator* respectively. That is not to say that Adorno lacked any contemporaneous engagement with social and political matters. Indeed, his 1959 essay "Was bedeutet: Auffarbeitung der Vergangenheit" ("What 'Working through the past' Means"[68]) "has become important for the reconsideration of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung.*"[69] The theoretical landscape was transformed for this work, and the more combative *Historikerstreit.* However, the dialectics of the academy gave way to public historical debate and, stylistically, the denseness of Adorno's intricate text was forsaken for the more clinical Habermas.[70]

In the eleven years since Lambert Zuidervaart noted that "for the most part," Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* has been "ignored in the English-speaking world"[71] there have been gentle advances into the grounds of Adorno's theoretical landscape. There is, however, an ever-present sense that the reception of Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* waxes and wanes in harmony with those trends that determine interest in aesthetics as an academic

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[68] " ..some disagreement among translators about the title of Adorno's famous essay...Timothy Bahti and Geoffrey Hartmann's translation, the most cited in the secondary literature, does not do adequate justice to the title because it renders "Aufarbeitung der Vergangebheit" as "coming to terms with the past" (the conventional, if also inadequate, translation for *Vergangenheitsbewaltigung),* whereas Henry Pickford's recent translation of the essay ("The meaning of Working through the Past"), although closer to the original, alters the nonnominalizing structure of the title. Since nominalizations of verbs are quite common in German, Adorno's avoidance of one ("Was bedeutet" rather than "Die Bedeutung") seems worth retaining, so I prefer "What 'Working through the Past' Means." Jaimey Fisher *Disciplining Germany: Youth, Reeducation and Reconstruction after the Second World War* (Detroit. Wayne State University Press, 2007) p. 276.

[69] ibid pp 276-277.

[70] "While Adorno was a member of the inner circle of figures associated with the Frankfurt school from the 1930s to his death in 1969, Habermas is of a later generation. Habermas, whose relationship with Frankfurt critical theory began when he became Adorno's assistant during the latter 1950s, is widely regarded as the direct inheritor of the mantle of this tradition from Adorno. This inheritance, however, has been substantially transfigured under Habermas's intellectual leadership. Notably, Habermas's transformation of critical theory involves an explicit rejection of Adorno's central negative dialectic and what I might call his aesthetic-critical theory, which were developed as responses to the latter's analysis of the fateful dialectic of enlightenment." Martin Morris *Rethinking the Communicative Turn· Adorno, Habermas and the Problem of Communicative Freedom* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001) p. 5.

[71] "If . Adorno has "turned into a classic" since the mid-1980s, it is a most peculiar classic, one whose last major book and its central philosophical claims are, for the most part, ignored in the English speaking world." Lambert Zuidervaart. *The Semblance of Subjectivity· Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts The MIT Press, 1997) p. 1.

study. After all, Theodor Adorno's conception of art as a liberative force generates the potential for art to dissect the paradoxical condition of enlightenment rationality that shaped the foundation for the philosophical and political irrationalism of Fascism. Adorno's determination to craft a non- or de-systematic modernism became posthumously redundant. However recently, and moreso, I suggest, in light of the Beuysian context, Adorno's elusive locating of art in a 'third' dimension between the rigidity of traditional philosophical thought and the ethereal and transcendent quality of the sublime, means that art – particularly the *experience* of art – is the ideal means by which to enter his work.

Any individual undertaking research that mines Adorno's ideological quarry should be critically aware of the stylistic (indeed, aesthetic) quirks of his writing. Though thoroughly documented as an essential consideration for readers of Adorno, the forthcoming comparisons I draw with Beuys's aesthetic add weight to this dictum.[72] The unwary researcher might well be consigned to the ranks of the misunderstanding many who have taken the task on board, only to 'abandon ship' after a trying and prolonged attempt to advance, page after page. However, to find comfort in its non-linear concentricity and tidal sweep is recommended for the otherwise flummoxed Anglophile; vast tracts of the difficult texts can be bypassed in moments of confusion, allowing the reader to move on to a more accessible theme or tract. This is by no means excusing skipping difficult text; besides, there is scant text that one would consider anything less than opaque. Rather, one needs to familiarise oneself with Adorno's style before being able to engage with the content. Here, Lambert Zuidervaart reflects on this when recalling his first encounter with *Aesthetic Theory*:

> In the quiet of someone else's study, surrounded by books that were not my own, I began to read Adorno's impenetrable, compelling, evocative prose. Some days I made little headway. Other days I found myself swept along by the drama of the text, yet unable to tell anyone else where I had been or what I had learned. Gradually, however, I began to glimpse the submerged dialectical structures that sustain Adorno's thought.[73]

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[72] See p 103 for an expansion on this theme with regard to Beuys's work.

[73] op. cit., Zuidervaart *Social Philosophy after Adorno* p. 1

Bound, as I am, to the (albeit excellent) English translation of *Asthetische Theorie* as undertaken by Robert Hullot-Kernor[74], I am compelled to gather as much qualified external insight and advice into the nature of the German text's style and expression as is possible. Indeed, one may argue that the English-reader needs to be more attentive to the internal rhythm and flourish of Adorno's text than might be the case for the German-reader:

> The original paratactical text is concentrically arranged around a mute middle point through which every word seeks to be refracted and that it must express. The text cannot refer forward or backward without disturbing this nexus through which the parts become binding on each other. The linear argumentative structure imposed on the text by the translation thus dismissed the text's middle point as a detour and severed its nexus.[75]

It is undeniably beneficial for the reader to discern the paratactical and chiastic method Adorno adopts. Parataxis, from the Greek *paratassein* – the act of 'placing side by side' from *para* (beside) and *tassein* (to arrange) – is one literary technique Adorno employed throughout *Aesthetic Theory*. The stylistic nature of paratactical writing allows concepts to be placed, side-by-side, without connecting words or terms that might otherwise deliver context. In a literary sense, Adorno's non-systematic, fractious approach pre-empts (what might cautiously be called) the *postmodern turn* to (the equally ambiguous) *postmodern condition.*

In light of Adorno's successors, most notably Habermas, who adopted a textual sequence and precision deemed more representative of their dialectic, one might wonder what a critically retrieved Adorno has to offer. Stylistically distancing Adorno even further from the likes of Habermas is his use of *chiasmus.* In addition to the paratactical formation of *Aesthetic Theory* the chiastic technique provides Adorno with an almost playful (yet wilful) means by which to present the reader with the paradox within his aesthetic project. *Chiasmus* (from the Greek *khiastos*, to arrange crosswise) depends – in Adorno's text – on the inversion of a primary statement into the antithetical other within the same sentence. Indeed, the very first sentence in *Aesthetic Theory* is chiastic: "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore..."[76] The beauty of this

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[74] The quality of Hullot-Kentor's translation is noted by Zuidervaart in *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991)

[75] op. cit., Hullot-Kentor. p. xiii.

[76] op. cit., Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory* p 1

example is that it represents both the concise formation of Adorno's style, and the value of a self-referential dialectic concerning modernity and post-modernity as flawed constructs. If, in its most primitive understanding, the postmodern intent was driven by the quest to construct a positive pathway through the gallimaufry of concept and culture that became the trademark of late 20th century philosophical contemplation, is Adorno's style and content opening a 'third way' between the two? Or are his critics justified in their spurning of Adorno's convolutions? What are we, the reader, to do with such work? Gillian Rose elaborates:

> An idea 'provocatively formulated' may be left and not enlarged upon, but may be restated later in the text with many different emphases. This gives an impression of confusion, but in fact amounts to a set of parallaxes, apparent displacements of an object due to changes of observation point. This is quite consistent with the idea that the object cannot be captured, and that a *set* of presentations may best approximate it. Adorno sometimes calls this a 'constellation', and he also describes this way of composing texts as 'paratactic', 'concentric', 'as a spider's web', and as a 'densely woven carpet.'[77]

Rose's generous interpretation doesn't counter the fact that Adorno's stylistic and intellectual progression meant that *Aesthetic Theory*, for all its 'impenetrable' and 'compelling' qualities, discourages readers from venturing into his more accessible back-catalogue, which contains some of his more immediately influential works, most notably *Minima Moralia*, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (co-authored with Max Horkheimer) and *Negative Dialectics*. This is a shame, as it has been suggested that Adorno's project has, from its earliest stages, contained the very philosophical impulse that came to shape his body of work, and, consequently his influence on both modern and post-modern philosophy. Zuidervaart observes this as present in Adorno's work as early as in his doctoral thesis, entitled, *The Transcendence of the Real and the Noematic in Husserl's Phenomenology*. Submitted in 1924, age 21, Adorno's critique of Husserl showed early evidence of critical thought:

> For just as Schönberg had overthrown tonality, the decaying form of bourgeois music, so Adorno's Husserl study attempted to overthrow idealism, the decaying form of bourgeois philosophy.[78] Adorno took from his Vienna days the model for an 'atonal philosophy' whose style

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[77] Gillian Rose. *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (London The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1978) p. 13

[78] Susan Buck-Morss. *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno. Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute* (Hassocks, Sussex. Harvester Press, 1977) p. 15.

> and concerns prefigure the antifoundational and deconstructive themes of more recent philosophies.[79]

Martin Jay's more defined check-list of the well-springs of Adorno's thought emphasises the confluence of "Western Marxism, aesthetic modernism, mandarin cultural despair, and Jewish self identification, as well as the more anticipatory pull of deconstruction."[80] Zuidervaart adds:

> ...the disparate philosophical sources of his aesthetics: Kant's notion of beauty as a symbol of morality and Hegel's view of art as a semblance of truth; Marx's critique of ideology and Nietzsche's suspicion of the ideology of critique, Lukacs's emphasis on social totality and Benjamin's stress on artistic fragments.[81]

Jay and Zuidervaart together define the complexity and burgeoning radicalism of Adorno's thought, yet a critical and oft neglected element of Adorno's development was his desire to become a composer. After graduating with his Doctorate from the University of Frankfurt, Adorno moved to Vienna to fulfil this desire, under the tutelage of Alban Berg.[82] This thesis' commitment to the relationship between visual art and philosophical thought determines some restriction regarding Adorno's relationship with the works of Berg, and, more significantly, Arnold Schönberg, however the importance of these composers is twofold. First, Adorno's fascination with conceptual features of the works of these composers – recognised as belonging to the Second Viennese Circle[83] – has significance in translation to other forms of creative artistry. Second, it will become evident that this link between Adorno and Schönberg will forge another link in the forthcoming study of Hanne Darboven's work *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983.*

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[79] op. cit., Zuidervaart. *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* p. 5.

[80] Martin Jay. *Adorno* (London: Fontana, 1984) p. 22.

[81] op. cit., Zuidervaart *Adorno's AestheticTheory· The Redemption of Illusion* p xvi

[82] For further detail of the musical and personal relationship between the two men, see: Alban Berg and Arnold Schoenberg, "The Berg - Schoenberg Correspondence. Gurrelieder and Lulu" *The Musical Times* (Volume. 129, no. 1739, January, 1988) pp. 8-13.

[83] The Second Viennese Circle, or School refers to the group of composers who were Schonberg's pupils. While inclusive of Schonberg himself, it extended to include: Alban Berg, Anton Webern, Heinrich Jalowetz, Erwin Stein and Egon Wellesz Later pupils who composed under the banner of the Second Viennese Circle and somewhat later Eduard Steuermann, Hanns Eisler, Rudolf Kolisch, Karl Rankl, Josef Rufer and Viktor Ullmann. Further reading: Pierre Boulez and Tim Souster "The Second Viennese School" *The Musical Times* (Volume. 110, no. 1515, May, 1969) pp. 473-476.

Arnold Schönberg (1874 – 1951) is considered among the most important composers of the 20th Century. During Adorno's studentship, Schönberg developed twelve-tone composition, a revolutionary compositional method that provided scope to challenge what he considered modern music's two central problems: tonality and dissonance.[84] That these became important aesthetic problems for Adorno is evidence of a relationship between art and philosophy existing outside the focus of this thesis, but remaining in line with its premise; here, we might consider *concept as sound*:

> With twelve-tone techniques, Schoenberg...decisively brought composition into the discourse of intellectual history. [He] accomplished this by developing the idea that musical composition, in analogy to science, was not an aesthetic project but rather a kind of problem solving.[85]

Notions of atonality and dissonance reverberate throughout Adorno's work, and, I believe form ideal descriptors for the visual aesthetic, and will in turn serve as critical notions in the analysis of the works of both Beuys and Darboven. In keeping with the biographical path, I should like to turn now to Adorno's engagement with the Frankfurt School.

In 1926, Adorno returned to Frankfurt and became acquainted with the figures with whom he would engage for decades thereafter. Through Max Horkheimer, Adorno met members of the University of Frankfurt's *Institut für Sozialforschung*. As well as the aforementioned Benjamin and Marcuse, Adorno engaged with the diverse characters of Leo Lowenthal, Friedrich Pollack, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill. Barely two years after assuming a teaching position at the University, the Nazi regime disestablished the institute and Adorno and his colleagues were forced to flee. The institute emerged briefly in Zurich, before finding a home in New York, in 1934. Though Adorno's migration was interrupted by some time at Oxford, by 1938 he had moved to the United States and rejoined the institute. This period is the entry into the first of what Zuidervaart delineates as the "three phases in [Adorno's] mature writing."[86] The first phase, from 1933-1949:

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[84] Schonberg outlined this problem further in his 1934 text "Problems of Harmony" as signaled in Arved Ashby "Schoenberg, Boulez, and Twelve-Tone Composition as 'Ideal Type'" *Journal of the American Musicological Society* (Volume. 54, no. 3, Autumn, 2001) p. 585.

[85] ibid.

[86] op. cit., Zuidervaart. *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* p. 6.

> . .is marked by interdisciplinary critiques of popular culture...These writings display an increasingly Hegelian style, a self-conscious importing of Freudian categories, and a complex appropriation of Nietzsche and of conservative culture critics such as Oswald Spengler.[87]

The second, from 1949-1958:

> ...is marked by essayistic interventions into high culture...Adorno's first major publications in this phase can be ead as attempts to provoke the superintendents of German high culture during post-war reconstruction. *Philosophy of Modern Music* challenges the official music scene; *Minima Moralia* meditates upon bitter experiences of German exiles; *In Search of Wagner* decodes the ambiguous work of the Nazis' favourite composer.[88]

and the third, the last decade of his life (from 1959 to 1969) defined, according to Zuidervaart, by *Aesthetic Theory*; "the last testament," he declares, "of a truly remarkable man."[89] What troubles Zuidervaart more, was the immediacy of the shift from first-generation Frankfurt School thought (as represented here by Adorno) to the second-generation (as represented here by Habermas). I don't imagine Zuidervaart objects to the pendulum of favour swinging from one side to another, however it is evident in reading that he finds the suddenness of this shift denying Adorno the opportunity to have *Aesthetic Theory* considered.

Zuidervaart effectively marks this occurrence as taking place on January 4, 1971, when Habermas delivered a radio lecture, taken from his essay "Wozu noch Philosophie." Nine years earlier, almost to the day, Theodor Adorno delivered a radio lecture, also titled "Wozu noch Philosophie." Though translated as, respectively, "Does Philosophy Still have a Purpose?" and "Why Still Philosophy?" the question elicits different response:

> When Adorno asked "Wozu noch Philosophie?" he wondered what philosophy could contribute to transforming society as a whole. This is no longer Habermas's question...Adorno's death marks the end of a "great tradition" of German philosophy, Habermas writes, and with it a "style of thought bound to individual erudition and personal testimony."[90]

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[87] ibid. p 7.

[88] ibid.

[89] ibid.

[90] op cit , Zuidervaart. *Social Philosophy After Adorno* p. 5.

Zuidervaart defines the importance of this shift in three respects:

> First, it supports serious misinterpretations of Adorno's thought. Second, it blunts the political edge of Critical Theory. Third, it results in a truncated vision of philosophy at a time when passion, not simply precision, is required.[91]

The immediacy and markedness of the shift is unquestioned. With overtones of Beuys's own swift fate at the hands of critics, the disfavour shown Adorno's work against the enthusiasm for Habermas's is palpable. This is slowly changing, with an increase in literature on Adorno's work, albeit more re-appraisal than re-discovery. Zuidervaart lists and critiques a number of these 'new' Adornians in his introductory chapter of *Social Philosophy after Adorno*, not all of them favourably. Though one of Zuidervaart's more favourable mentions on this list – Simon Jarvis – isn't immune from a little correction:

> ...Jarvis too readily accepts Habermasian criticisms of Adorno's 'metaphysics,' and he leaves Adorno's aesthetics intact. If Adorno's writings on art and the culture industry belong to a larger project of social philosophy, then his central aesthetic claims also need to be re-examined in a social-philosophical context.[92]

Zuidervaart also rejects the desire by Christoph Menke "to reconstruct Adorno's aesthetics along Derridean lines." Menke's deconstructive take on Adorno's aesthetic theory is, according to Zuidervaart, an attempt "to reclaim two strands of modern aesthetics":

> According to the first strand, aesthetic experience is *autonomous*, adhering to its own internal logic and having its own place alongside other discourses and modes of experience. When this strand dominates, art appears isolated and irrelevant. According to the second strand, aesthetic experience is *sovereign*, exceeding its own internal logic, disrupting all other discourses, and thereby providing "an experientially enacted critique of reason." When this strand dominates in aesthetics, art gets saddled with metaphysical or social-critical burdens it cannot carry.[93]

Zuidervaart's attention to Adorno's aesthetics and his explicit insistence that it be re-examined brings this thesis to the potential role the work of art might play. However, part of the problem facing those reconsidering Adorno's aesthetics is the limited cultural

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[91] ibid. p. 6.

[92] ibid , p. 9.

[93] ibid., pp. 18-19

palette with which Adorno worked. That is not to say that he wasn't knowledgeable in his field; rather, that *beyond* that field he became a little uneasy. His writings and lectures on music are extensive, but remained limited in their scope. In *Aesthetic Theory*, the most contemporary visual artist mentioned is Swiss painter Paul Klee, who died in 1940. Introducing Adorno's contemporaries in the visual arts, and the representational qualities unique to post-war art, this thesis brings new players to the task of his critical retrieval.

Adorno's reception history is, to at least some degree, understood as one of ebb and flow; but what of *Aesthetic Theory* itself, and its role in this thesis? To press forth with the journey into the Beuysian aesthetic, quarrying Adorno's *magnum opus*, themes are revealed that Beuys himself was confronting in the post-Holocaust German cultural landscape. As confronting as they may be to some, the immediacy of Beuys's work – inherent in any visual representation – is antithetical to Adorno's text. Unlike Beuys, for whom the best introduction remains pictorial, Adorno benefits from the clarity afforded secondary texts with their impressionistic brush-stokes:

> ...Adorno's aesthetics employs a complex idea of artistic autonomy. Modern art is the social antithesis of society, he asserts. Because Western society strips art of overt social functions, the best modern art can engage in a determinate negation of society and thereby offer both utopian vision and social critique.[94]

Having explained Adorno's stylistic anomalies, I will introduce the ideas central to his aesthetic philosophy by way of a cited journey through particular tracts of *Aesthetic Theory*. To propose, or construct a methodological approach to this task seems a little misplaced, if not disagreeable, in light of what we know of Adorno's style; remembering he "shunned systematic philosophy and doubted whether true thinking could ever achieve transparency."[95] Tom Huhn continues along this line with Adorno's own words: "True thoughts are those alone which do not understand themselves."

> His complaint against systematic philosophy was of a piece with his sweeping objection to *methodological* thinking. Both suffer an avoidance of the purported object of inquiry by the very constraints that allow them to have a goal or isolate a phenomenon in the first place. Systematic philosophy and methodological thinking share a predilection for reaching conclusions that too

[94] ibid, p 10

[95] Tom Huhn (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 3.

> often cannot help but confirm whatever presuppositions are embedded in their premises. In this way, thinking becomes not only opaque to itself but also rigid, like a thing, before it has the opportunity to allow things to encounter it or for it to become something else.[96]

There are certain qualities in Adorno's approach that are reminiscent of Beuys's unease with the traditions of art-practice, and, though it would be most disingenuous to simply consider Beuys and Adorno as contemporaries whose works should stand alongside each other as contemplations on the state of culture in the wake of collective trauma, I do not question that this is the case. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that the scant evidence of any unitary reading of the two men is an extraordinary theoretical and historical miscarriage. This said, any thesis might well stand as a significant contribution to these fields by pointing out the complimentary, or supplementary nature of their works. However, I would consider a more valuable construction one that considers (dare I say) the 'gaps' within Beuys's and Adorno's work, and works towards a union of ideas that might not only explain the greater contribution of the two, but add to the understanding of the transition in art and aesthetic philosophy.

2.2 Adorno to Beuys: 'a critical retrieval'

To engage with *Aesthetic Theory* is to understand Adorno's re-conception of the scope, conditions of production, and critical role of art in light of the "radically evil society"[97] from whence it had emerged. Naturally, the destruction of and disruption to civility shook the very foundations of artistic production:

> It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist. The forfeiture of what could be done spontaneously or unproblematically has not been compensated for by the open infinitude of new possibilities that reflection confronts. In many regards, expansion appears as contraction.[98]

Adorno's obsessive theoretical dismantling of the path and progress of enlightenment is central to understanding his positioning of art as the significant *other* in this process. It is

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[96] ibid.

[97] Raymond Geuss. "Art and Criticism in Adorno's Aesthetics" *European Journal of Philosophy* (Volume 6, no. 3, 1998) p. 300.

[98] op. cit., Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory* p 1.

sometimes a little unclear what this *other*-ness constitutes; very early in *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno considers works of art "detach[ed]...from the empirical world," bringing forth "another world, one opposed to the empirical world."[99] Elsewhere, Adorno positions art less as an oppositional force, and more as a referential memorial:

> All enlightenment is accompanied by the anxiety that what set enlightenment in motion in the first place and what enlightenment ever threatens to consume may disappear: truth. Thrown back on itself, enlightenment distances itself from that guileless objectivity that it would like to achieve; that is why, under the compulsion of its own ideal of truth, it is conjoined with the pressure to hold on to what it has condemned in the name of truth. Art is this mnemosyne.[100]

Either way, the inherent 'truthfulness' in the work of art is the key to its participation in enlightenment. For Adorno, works of art "...do not feign the literalness of what speaks out of them...their own tension is binding in relation to the tension external to them."[101] While in line with Adorno's Hegelian understanding of art's great significance – beyond the folly of "entertainment moral improvement, or even low-level criticism of social evils á la Dickens"[102] – his turn on Hegel's perception is that art "is to be radically critical, negative not affirmative.[103] However, the critical re-evaluation applied to Adorno's modernity must also be applied to art, to "turn against itself, in opposition to its own concept, and thus become uncertain of itself right into its innermost fiber."[104] This is not, for Adorno a dismissal by 'abstract negation.' Rather:

> By attacking what seemed to be its foundation throughout the whole of its tradition, art has been qualitatively transformed; it itself becomes qualitatively other...the specifically artistic in art must be derived concretely from its other; that alone would fulfil the demands of a materialistic-dialectical aesthetics.[105]

Though Adorno, perhaps unjustly, announces his affiliation with the Hegelian reading of art as 'transitory,' he supplements Hegel's vision "of the possible death of art [according] with the fact that art is a product of history" by stating, with historical hindsight, that

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[99] ibid., p. 2.

[100] ibid., p. 106

[101] ibid., p. 6.

[102] op. cit., Geuss. p. 300.

[103] ibid.

[104] op. cit , Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory* p. 2.

[105] ibid , p. 3

"art's substance could be its transitoriness."[106] Adorno may well distinguish his aesthetic philosophy from Hegel's in minutiae, however there is little doubt about the over-arching influence of Hegel's founding aesthetic principles. In the chapter titled 'Natural Beauty' Adorno makes historical note of a most significant aesthetic distinction:

> Since Schelling, whose aesthetics is entitled the *Philosophy of Art*, aesthetic interest has centred on artworks. Natural beauty, which was still the occasion of the most penetrating insights in the *Critique of Judgement*, is now scarcely even a topic of theory...Natural beauty vanished from aesthetics as a result of the burgeoning domination of the concept of freedom and human dignity, which was inaugurated by Kant and then rigorously transplanted into aesthetics by Schiller and Hegel; in accord with this concept nothing in the world is worthy of attention except that for which the autonomous subject has itself to thank.[107]

To even outline the distinctions between Kantian and Hegelian aesthetic philosophy is a monumental task. To attempt an abbreviated representation is to do injustice to the work, not only of Kant and Hegel, but also to the countless many who have committed their time and intellectual energy to the complexities of this discourse. Nevertheless, a recurring observation is Hegel's indebtedness to Kant as more often than not presented in opposition.[108] However, Hegel concedes that Kant's *Critique of Judgement* represents not only "the culmination of Kant's critical philosophy but also as an admission...of the limitations of his earlier works and of the need to remedy their shortcomings."[109] The greatest distinction between Kant's and Hegel's aesthetic philosophy remains their respective definitions of aesthetic judgement, particularly with regards to nature, or

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[106] ibid , p 4.

[107] ibid., p. 82.

[108] "Hegel's specific objections to the foundational arguments of the first and second *Critiques* are well known In connection with the first *Critique*, Hegel disputes the legitimacy of Kant's division of the theoretical faculties into sensibility and understanding; the adequacy of the metaphysical deduction of the categories from the traditional table of judgements and its failure to show either the immanent connection between the categories or their common origin in a fundamental principle, the warrant for his assertion of the transcendental ideality of the objects of possible experience; the grounds for his distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves, and the satisfactoriness of Kant's conception of dialectic (and, by extension, of his resolution of the antinomies and paralogisms). With respect to the second *Critique*, Hegel charges that Kant's categorical imperative is empty and formal; that his strict opposition of happiness to morality is untenable; and that the practical postulates project morality into an abstract and unattainable beyond." Allen Hance. "The Art of Nature: Hegel and the Critique of Judgment" *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* (Volume 6 no. 1, 1998) p 38. Karl Ameriks essay also contains some relevant reference to this relationship "Hegel's Critique of Kant's Theoretical Philosophy" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (Volume 46, no. 1, September, 1985) pp 1-35.

[109] op cit , Hance. p. 38.

natural beauty. While Kant devotes great tracts of *Critique of Judgement* to discerning what the contemplation of natural beauty means as an aesthetic judgement, Hegel makes short shrift of such concerns. In his lecture "The Range of Aesthetic Defined, and Some Objections against the Philosophy of Art Refuted" he states:

> By the above expression [the 'Philosophy of Fine Art'] we at once exclude the *beauty of Nature.* Such a limitation of our subject may appear to be an arbitrary demarcation, resting on the principle that every science has the prerogative of marking out its boundaries at pleasure. But this is not the sense in which we are to understand the limitation of Aesthetic to *the beauty of art.*[110]

Hegel goes further, considering the imitation of nature in a work of art as either *superfluous* ("...seeing that the things which pictures, theatrical representations, etc., imitate and represent...are before us in other cases already."[111]), *imperfect* ("Comes far short of nature. For art is restricted in its means of representation..."[112]) or *Amusing merely as Sleight of Hand* ("...there remains as end nothing beyond our pleasure in the sleight of hand which can produce something so like nature."[113]). Rodolphe Gasché summarises thus:

> Life (*Lebendigkeit*), however, and as far as nature is concerned, natural life, is for Hegel the sole thing that is beautiful. Whereas for Kant the beautiful of nature is the eminently beautiful, and according to *The Metaphysics of Morals*, first and foremost certain things in inanimate nature, the interconnection between life and beauty compels Hegel not only to exclude objects of inanimate nature from beauty but also to value the beauty of art over that of nature.[114]

Hegel's philosophy of aesthetics and nature is to some degree absorbed into Adorno's system. However, this is not to say that Adorno is uncritical of Hegel. Indeed there are points at which Adorno's distancing from Hegel's thought is clear.[115] Nevertheless,

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[110] G W. F Hegel. "The Range of Aesthetic Defined, and Some Objections against the Philosophy of Art Refuted" *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* (London· Penguin Books, 2004) p. 4

[111] ibid., p 47

[112] ibid.

[113] ibid

[114] Rodolphe Gasche. "The Theory of Natural Beauty and Its Evil Star: Kant, Hegel, Adorno " *Research in Phenomenology* (Volume 32, 2002) p. 104.

[115] "Hegel's critique of Kant's formalism ought to have valorized nonformal concreteness. This critique was not, however, within Hegel's purview; it is perhaps for this reason that he confused the material elements of art with its representational content [*Inhalt*]. By rejecting the fleetingness of natural beauty, as well as virtually everything non-conceptual, Hegel obtusely makes himself indifferent to the central motif of art, which probes after truth in the

Adorno's objection to the Kantian expansion of aesthetic experience so that "natural phenomena overwhelmingly in their grandeur began to be consciously perceived as beautiful" mirrored the Hegelian opinion of this "consciousness [as] ephemeral."[116] Adorno took this point of confusion as significant in the problematic relationship modern society has with natural beauty, and, further, its perception of natural beauty in relation to artistic beauty.

What is it that this brings to Adorno's work as relative to Beuys? First, in Hegel and subsequently in Adorno, the 'beauty of life' over nature forges a path into the territory both Adorno and Beuys traverse. In particular, the *anti*-aesthetic impulses triggered within both by the aftermath of the Second World War brought to the fore questions concerning mankind's relationship to nature. The materials Beuys used to conjure sensations of destruction and desecration in many ways prefigure Adorno's thoughts: "...the deaestheticization of art is not only a stage of art's liquidation but also the direction of its development."[117]

By mapping the course of his posthumous reception I have outlined Adorno's aesthetic-philosophical inheritance, fleshed out some of his aesthetic-philosophical premises and highlighted some of the matters that have troubled, and, subsequently, assisted his 'critical retrieval'. By mapping a corresponding course for Joseph Beuys, this thesis will prepare the reader for entry into the Beuysian aesthetic as represented by *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964.*

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evanescent and fragile. Hegel's philosophy fails vis-à-vis beauty: because he equates reason and the real through the quintessence of their mediations, hypostatizes the subjective preformation of the existing as the absolute; thus for him the nonidentical only figures as a restraint on subjectivity rather than that he determines the experience of the nonidentical as the telos and emancipation of the aesthetic subject. Progressive dialectical aesthetics becomes necessary to critique even Hegel's aesthetics " op. cit., Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory* p. 99

[116] ibid., p. 91.

[117] ibid., p. 105

3. LITERATURE: INTERPRETATION AND RECEPTION OF BEUYS'S WORK

> ...one could almost speak of the necessity of an archaeology of the Beuys literature at this point.
>
> Benjamin H. Buchloh – "Reconsidering Joseph Beuys Once Again" (2001)

Thus far I have outlined the development of multi- and interdisciplinary scholarly interest in Beuys, leading up to the almost cult-like following he received during his time as Professor of Monumental Sculpture at the Dusseldorf Academy and his entry into political activism as a proponent of Direct Democracy and ecological politics. By way of introducing Theodor Adorno's aesthetic philosophy, the thesis then bridges the divide between the two men, uniting them in their consideration of the post-Holocaust condition. Here, the thesis progresses with an engagement with Beuys by way of the critical reception and/or retrieval of his work during the last three decades. It do this to give the viewer/reader alternative views of Beuys's work, and, consequently, to illustrate the benefits of having access to extensive textual reference when considering an artwork as philosophical work. As will become evident, there are numerous variables in the reception and interpretation of a work of art that impact on our capacity to 'read' such a work as philosophical work. While still arguing that these variables need not make such works any less accessible by my method, having such an extensive range of critical text affirms Beuys as a prototypical artist for this method. It is, in a sense, proposing that building a body of critical text (as the thesis will continue to do for Anselm Kiefer and Hanne Darboven) is the first step in restoring the bond between concept and form.

My equation for this task thus falls into line with this thesis' structure this far. That is:

1. an outline and assessment of the artist's development,
2. a consideration of a philosophical work (or body of philosophical work) that is conceptually aligned or relative, and finally,
3. before taking a single work as representative of the greater task, taking into account the critical reception of the artist's work so as to have an appreciation of alternative viewpoints that may affect your ideas, or introduce new concerns, regarding the artist and her/his work.

Herein this thesis engages with the third of these requirements, starting with the first significant example of a particularist reading of Joseph Beuys's work with a theoretical backdrop: Benjamin Buchloh's damning essay, "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol."[118] By tracing Beuys's 'decline' as initiated by Buchloh's essay, 1980 becomes this section's point of entry to Beuys's work. Though advancing well beyond the construction of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, and by-passing several key events in Beuys's development, Buchloh's text, and the other readings central to this examination of Beuys fill this gap by way of accounts of this time with critical hindsight. Thus, rather than proffering a re-hashed biography, these works perform this task while examining their take on the life and works of Joseph Beuys. Having approached *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* from the perspective of both prelude and aftermath, I will have completed the form by which the work might be understood according to the thesis' core premise.

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As a prelude, consider the following insights into Beuys's arrival in the United States, home to a very different audience, Benjamin Buchloh included:

> Beuys exhibited in the United States about two dozen times, fifteen of them in New York. A note of reservation about America was often sounded in his expanded concept of art.[119]

From his messianic position in the 1960s European avant-garde as the social and aesthetic pedagogue-*cum*-revolutionary, Beuys fell hard on American soil. His first visit, in January 1974, was marked by a series of Public Dialogues,[120] which, though well attended, signaled the American trend for politicised and highly theorised readings of Beuys's avant-gardism[121] that would persist for much of the next decade. At a New York

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[118] op. cit , Buchloh. "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol – Preliminary notes for a Critique" pp. 36-43.

[119] op. cit., Stachelhaus. p. 172.

[120] This term, which Beuys preferred to 'lectures' is used in Carin Kuoni's introductory passage to the transcript of "A Public Dialogue: New York City, 1974" reprinted in *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America.* op cit , Kuoni p. 25.

[121] "...the view of the avant-garde artwork as a species of theorizing...is a particularly powerful one, often deployed over the last twenty years in such commanding journals as *Artforum* and *Art in America* However, despite its popularity, this approach to the avant-garde artwork raises a host of problems. One wonders for example, if avant-garde artworks

dialogue, one student commented to Beuys on his theoretical likeness to Nietszche (whom, the student said, "hated" socialism[122]), and then asked why Beuys was favorable to socialism. Beuys responded:

> I hate socialism too when it's only mentioned in a vacuum...socialism means nothing, unless all the powers you find in human nature for freedom, equality, and brotherhood are included in the context of socialism.[123]

Beuys tried desperately to redirect other such questions: "Aren't you making art the new politics?"[124] asked one; "I want to know why you haven't been to the United States prior to this visit," asked another, who continued, accusingly, "was there some requirement that the country had to meet, in its attitude or its morals, before you would visit it?"[125]

Beuys returned to America that May, for the *Aktion*[126] "Coyote: I like America and America likes me."[127] This *Aktion* typified Beuys's understanding of art's renewed role in society. Personal and physical involvement with his work not only marked a shift away from traditional understandings of art as an aesthetic commodity, but recognised the therapeutic nature of art in its ability to offer alternative expression of social problems.

Beuys's conceptualization of *Gestaltung* recognised 'invisible' sculptural materials (thought, ideas, language, emotions) and transformed them into visible materials, either sculptural or performed. Americans had already experienced one aspect of Beuys's performance. Now it was their chance to experience his *Aktionen*, and there were to be no Public Dialogues. "I want to isolate myself, insulate myself," said Beuys, "see nothing of America other than the coyote."[128] From his arrival at Kennedy Airport "wrapped from head to foot in felt,"[129] Beuys was:

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are really theoretical?" Nöel Carroll. "Avant-Garde Art and the Problem of Theory" *Journal of Aesthetic Education* (Volume 29, no 3, Fall, 1995) p. 2.

[122] Joseph Beuys "A Public Dialogue: New York City, 1974" op.cit., Kuoni p. 33

[123] ibid

[124] ibid , p. 37

[125] ibid.

[126] "Beuys's involvement with [creative/artistic collective] Fluxus launched his performance activity, for which he used the term *Aktionen* (actions)" Ann Temkin, "Joseph Beuys: An Introduction to His Life and Work" op. cit., Temkin and Rose p 15

[127] One week long *Aktion*, at Rene Block Gallery, New York City, May 1974.

[128] Joseph Beuys "Coyote, I like America and America likes me" op. cit., Kuoni. p.141

[129] Caroline Tisdall. *Joseph Beuys· Coyote* (Munchen: Scirmer/Mosel, 1976) p 20.

> loaded into an ambulance...and driven straight to the place which he was to share with the coyote. The action ended a week later when, once more insulated in felt, he was carried back to the ambulance on the first stage of his journey back to Europe.[130]

On his return to Europe, Beuys reflected on his experience with the coyote:

> I believe I have made contact with the psychological trauma point of the United States' energy constellation: the whole American trauma with the Indian, the Red Man. You could say that a reckoning has to be made with the coyote, and only then can the trauma be lifted.[131]

However Beuys may well have wished for a return to his insulated state on the successive visits to America that yielded little that was positive for Beuys. Desperate attempts to team Beuys's energised intensity with Andy Warhol's retrograde aloofness proved mostly fruitless, and even becoming the first German artist to have a retrospective exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum failed to curb interrogatory interviewers. Beuys's subjection to the rhetoric and questioning of New York art critic Art Papier's 1979 interview[132] express the emerging scepticism among art critics that would soon spill over into the savagery of Buchloh:

> PAPIER: None of what I've seen or read [about your work] speaks directly to the political realities of your life. Yesterday, I heard you talk about the evils of economic profit in philosophical terms. Let's talk about profit in terms of your show at the Guggenheim museum...[133]

Beuys responds, perhaps predictably, speaking in terms of the pedagogical merits of creativity, rich in spirit, funding societal profit. Then, in the midst of rejecting Papier's mocking proclamation of Beuysian 'stardom', Beuys is interrupted:

> PAPIER: You say you don't encourage stardom, but I see you publicly signing catalogs and posters. Your multiples cost a lot of money. People buy ownership of Joseph Beuys objects. The concepts seem very unimportant to these people.
> BEUYS: But, you see, I don't judge about how people work, watching what they take out of catalogs, political manifestoes or things, I don't judge.

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[130] ibid.

[131] op.cit., Kuoni.

[132] Art Papier, Interview with Joseph Beuys "I put me on this train!" ibid., pp. 39-51.

[133] ibid , p.40.

PAPIER: Okay, let's look at the multiples that are for sale in the museum. A $50 felt eraser with your signature – what intellectual, political value does that have?
BEUYS: It is a kind of vehicle you know...[134]

This thirst for an intellectualised or politicised explanation of Beuys's work climaxed with Buchloh's contribution, and effectively snuffed out any major, English-language opposition to this perspective. The silence following Buchloh's scorn was only ever intermittently broken by relatively disinterested reviews and minor critiques, with the Papier-Beuys interview even being reheated for small-time art journal *Wedge*[135] some three years after its original publication, exposing the staid acceptance of Papier's (and, subsequently, Buchloh's) accusatory tone.

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In 1986, this silence gave way to the catalytic force of Beuys's death, with reassessment emerging from the midst of obituaries and recollections *in memoriam.* Beuys's physical and political malaise had been appropriately analogous with the passing of the Cold War world order. With romantic and literary licence we may even plot Gorbachev putting the '*Perestroika* pen' to paper, as Beuys gasped this last breath. For with these last gasps of once great man and once great empire, the end to the intense politicising of Beuys – as practiced in American art theory journals in the pre-*Perestroika* years – was nigh. The critical focus thus shifted from Beuys's *Politik* to *Geistesleben.*[136]

This shift away from politicised reading did not necessarily mean a shift towards more accurate or appropriate readings. Louwrijen Wijers well-intended but misguided collection of Beuys and Beuys-related interviews (finally made available in an English-language publication – *Writing as Sculpture* – in 1998) that took place between 1978 and 1987, reflect a determination to locate Beuys in the rush of reconsideration following his death. However, Wijers' failure to capture the imagination of those who turned instead,

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[134] ibid., p.44.

[135] Brian Mariani. *Wedge: An Aesthetic Inquiry* (No 1, Summer, 1982) pp. 4-9.

[136] Alternately translated as 'spiritual life' or 'spiritual existence.' op. cit., Moffitt. p.175.

with obsessive fervor, to the Beuys-Steiner[137] relationship, aided the revival of Western esoteric[138] readings of Beuysian scholarship. By 1988 Steinerian readings of the Beuys aesthetic were gathering momentum as the vehicle for a 'truer' understanding of Beuysian theory. In this year John F. Moffitt published his comprehensive, Steiner-obsessed book, *Occultism in Avant-Garde Art: The Case of Joseph Beuys*, while the once icily political art theory journal *October* diffused enough of its scepticism to grace Beuys the attention of three critical essays in its 45th edition.

While Moffitt was engrossed with the Beuys-Steiner connection – not only devoting an entire chapter of *Occultism in Avant-Garde Art* to this ("The Beuys-Steiner Connection"), but subsequent chapters, delving deeper ("Beuys's Anthropological Imagery") and deeper ("Deeper Yet into Anthroposophy") into Steiner-relative discourse – the summer edition of *October* had three (out of seven) articles dedicated to Beuys, each with vastly varying objectives. The opening article of the trilogy – Eric Michaud's "The Ends of Art according to Beuys" – employed quasi-Christian hermeneutics to plot Beuys's career according to the idea of *Gestaltung*.[139] Although Thierry de Duve's deceptively titled contribution: "Joseph Beuys, or Last of the Proletarians," used politico-economic language, he located Beuys's *Politik* in an alternative dimension, with creativity as the foundation of economics. Duve's reading, a rare recognition and understanding of the paradox in the distinct-yet-inseparable Beuysian theories, was followed by Stefan Germer's essay "Haacke, Broodthaers, Beuys." In the context of artists Hans Haacke and Marcel Broodthaers' experience with, and response to, political censorship, Germer painted Beuys in opposition, as purveyor of dubious Germanic tendencies. Alternately positioned by Germer (via Broodthaers[140]) as Wagnerian and Steinerian, the essay recalls some of the concern of Buchloh's article (without the venom) and some of Moffitt's obsession (without the detail).

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[137] "...for this...inquiry . we shall more specifically dub all these Beuysian manifestations the ritualized. Indeed literalized, reenactments of a very specific *pseudophilosophy*, namely Anthroposophy, founded at the turn of the century in Germany by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925)." ibid., p. 105.

[138] Wouter J. Hanegraff. "Some Remarks on the Study of Western Esotericism" *Esoterica: A Journal of Esoteric Studies* (A "peer-reviewed on-line academic journal of esoteric studies" compiled by the Michigan State University, available http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/Hanegraff.html) Accessed 16:34, August 20, 2004) Paragraph 4

[139] In the context of Michaud's article, *Gestaltung* is taken as meaning Beuys's tactile *formation* of thought. See Eric Michaud "The Ends of Art According to Joseph Beuys" *October* 45 (Summer, 1988) p. 39.

[140] "...who publically accused Beuys of Wagnerism." Kim Levin "Introduction" op.cit., Kuoni. p. 3.

While the *October* essays exposed some of the weathered political inclinations of the editorial board, and Moffitt was left to defend his obsessive Steinerian reading, there was enough to mark the year as significant in the reappraisal of Beuys. *October* again signaled a renewed period of theoretical critical silence among English-language journalists. This silence was only intermittently broken, by essays like David Adams' "Joseph Beuys: Pioneer of a Radical Ecology" which was published in *Artforum* in the northern summer of 1992; the very same journal Buchloh had savaged Beuys in, in 1980.

For a moment, Adams' positive fusion of Beuysian readings seemed complete if not wholly revisionary. His ecological angle suited those Steinerian 'nature-spirit' readings of Beuysian esotericism, and located Beuys in that ever-elusive political arena. Adams no doubt contributed to Beuys's comfortable theoretical transition into the 1990s by associating Beuys with ecological politics which, while again misguidedly politicising him, suited critical art theory journalists looking for a new angle to re-popularise and mythologise his contribution. However, posterity has not been kind to Adams' reading, essentially for failing to recognise Beuys's *Geistesleben*, but also for not preempting the coming spiritual shift in Beuysian reading.

I have already briefly examined the reading of Beuys's Christian inheritance (alternately recognised as centred around Christology, and what Alain Borer refers to as Beuys's *cathology*[141]) according to Friedhelm Mennekes who witnessed Beuys concerning himself

> ...with all aspects of the world, and foremost with the spiritual dimension. As a result of his upbringing within the Rhineland's Catholic tradition, the Christian outlook predominates his perspective – even despite, and indeed because of the experience of seeing the world break apart in the course of his wartime experience. This experience may well have been the source of some key themes which were to develop later.[142]

By the time Mennekes' text *Joseph Beuys: Christus DENKEN/THINKING Christ* was published, eight years had passed since John F. Moffitt's and *October*'s revisionary readings, the same period of time that had elapsed since Buchloh's before them. What makes Mennekes' contribution to Beuysian scholarship as significant as Moffitt's, the *October* journalists' and Buchloh's, is that same determination to present a highly specific

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[141] "...having received a strict Catholic upbringing, Beuys's work is permeated not with Catholicity, nor any conformity to dogma, but rather with *cathology*, a mixture of culture and apostolic language " op cit., Borer. p 31.

[142] op.cit., Mennekes. p. 92.

and scholarly Beuysian reading founded in a deeply personal agenda. What gives Mennekes' contribution added weight however, is his recognition (perhaps aided by hindsight) of both this personal agenda, and criticism of it:

> The difficulties that the art-historical establishment have with the notion of religion in Beuys' work are only too evident, whether 'coolly' dismissing it as the *dialect of superstition* or as *attempt at theodicy* or whether despite the evidence the religious connection is simply devalued as inappropriate *Christological interpretation*, as *too one-dimensional* or even *jesuitical*.[143]

This understanding is central to Mennekes' success as a Beuysian scholar. Mennekes' ability to envision macrocosmic implications in Beuys's work lends force to his microcosmic reading, and helps define not only the purpose of his work, but the hopes this author has for this thesis:

> Whatever the case...this volume of conversations and essays is designed to spur readers on to consult further books and catalogues dealing with other aspects of Beuys's work.[144]

3.1 Twilight and Darkness: 1980-1987

> Nobody who understands any contemporary science, politics or esthetics, for that matter, could want to see in Beuys' proposal for an integration of art, sciences and politics...anything more than simple-minded utopian drivel lacking elementary political and educational practicality.[145]

Benjamin Buchloh's vitriol, directed at the 'simple-mindedness' of Beuysian theory, is perhaps less astonishing if the Beuysian *Politik* is taken at face value. Beuys's erratic political activity throughout the 1970s was initiated by his peculiarly titled 1973 manifesto, "I am searching for field character."[146] It opens:

> Only on condition of a radical widening of definition will it be possible for art and activities related to art to provide evidence that art is now the only evolutionary-revolutionary power. [147]

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[143] ibid., p. 4.

[144] ibid

[145] op. cit., Buchloh. p. 37.

[146] Joseph Beuys "I am searching for field character" op cit., Kuoni pp 21-23.

[147] ibid , p. 22.

The manifesto is littered with those classic Beuysian catchphrases that confronted the intellectualism Buchloh and his colleagues cherished. As if expecting derision, Beuys propounds simplisms: "Every human being is an artist;" "The expanded concept of art;" "The social organism as a work of art."[148]

In retrospect, Beuys's contribution to the German political landscape (and consequently, greater Europe's) is remarkably under-rated. As one of the founding members of the German Green Party, and at the forefront of the Europe-wide Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum, Beuys has played a minor, but significant role in European political discourse since the Second World War. Though the pluralism of his Student Party failed to impact, and his candidacy for European Parliament (for the German Greens) was unsuccessful, it remains that Joseph Beuys's political voice was – if not popularly supported – respected and influential.[149] Through his work as a sculptor and his development of the idea of sculpture as a spatial metaphor for social organisation he presaged calls for a Third Way balancing the needs for individual freedom and collective cooperation. Thus, the psychodrama of Buchloh's essay (with Beuys playing the *simple-minded utopian*) has perhaps missed one very important point; Beuys was political, but not a political intellectual. Long-time associate of Beuys, Lucio Amelio, recalled Beuys's criticism of intellectualised political 'theory':

> Beuys was against formalizations. He preferred to say, "And then there are the angels." He thought that intellectuals and art historians destroy innocence...he wrote "Intellectual Abstraction"...[meaning] intellectualism is an abstraction of reality; it interrupts the movement from the ground to the sky. It's an abstraction that removes one from the natural process of becoming a spirit.[150]

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[148] ibid., pp. 21-23.

[149] "To the extent that his political activities can be separated from his work and his actions, they might be briefly catalogued into the successive founding of sundry parties and movements, countless discussions and debates, or meetings with influential decision-makers: Willy Brandt in 1970, Rudi Dutschke in 1977, Lech Walesa and the Dalai Lama in 1982." op.cit., Borer p. 28.

[150] Lucio Amelio. "The Neapolitan Tetralogy: An interview with Lucio Amelio" Pamela Kort in *Joseph Beuys **Arena** – where would I have got if I had been intelligent!* Lynne Cooke and Karin Kelly (eds) (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1994) p.39.

Yet so convincing and conclusive was the merciless language of Buchloh's scorn, that it marked a period of critical silence that surrounded Beuys until his death. His obsession with dismantling Beuys-idolatry ("Beuys's existential and ideological followers" Buchloh declared, "are blind-folded like cultists by their leader's 'charisma.'"[151]) is founded on exposing what Buchloh empirically concludes are dishonourable truths and falsehoods. One particular tirade concentrates on Beuys's most enduring myth: as the *Luftwaffe* pilot who, upon crash-landing his JU-87[152] fighter in the Crimea, was rescued by Tartar nomads and saved from exposure and dehydration by being covered in a layer of fat and wrapped in felt:

> Beuys' most spectacular biographic *fable convenue*, the plane crash in Crimea, which supposedly brought him in contact with Tartars...seems as contrived as it is dramatic ...Beuys' "myth of origin" is an intricate mixture of facts and memory-material rearranged according to the dynamics of the neurotic lie.[153]

Beuys's recollection has been accompanied, in various publications, by photographs of Beuys alongside the wreckage of (what is supposedly) his plane. Again Buchloh strikes: "Who would, or could, pose for photographs after a plane crash, when severely injured? And who took the photographs? The Tartars with their fat-and-felt camera?"[154]

The hermeneutics of Beuys's experience mirror interpretations of biblical texts along the literal and mystic lines of the rationalist and the romantic, respectively. In his essay (in response to Buchloh's critique) "Joseph Beuys: Between Showman and Shaman"[155] Donald Kuspit prefers an interpretive approach to the Tartar myth (or, as defined by Buchloh, Beuys's 'myth of origin'):

> For Buchloh, the creativity of identification...and the myth of self that follows from it, and finally of the art that follows the myth, is incomprehensible. Anything to do with creativity is incomprehensible to them, because ideology has priority over creativity in their minds...Personal

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[151] op.cit., Buchloh p 38.

[152] Junker 87 'Stuka' divebomber, one of the *Luftwaffe's* principal fighter-planes. Further reading: H.W. Koch. *History of Warfare* (London: Bison Books Ltd., 1987) p. 528.

[153] op.cit., Buchloh. p. 38.

[154] ibid.

[155] Donald Kuspit. "Joseph Beuys: Between Showman and Shaman" *Joseph Beuys: Diverging Critiques* David Thistlewood (ed.) (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995) pp. 26-47.

> mythology is a way of dealing with trauma, and as such is necessary for psychological survival...Beuys engaged his trauma voluntarily rather than submitted to it compulsively.[156]

Here, Kuspit points to that which is beyond Buchloh's method, but essential for Beuys: the therapeutic use of mythology. For Buchloh, Beuysian mythology represented a more worrying incarnation of Beuys's wartime experience:

> What the myth does tell us...is how an artist...tries to come to terms with the period of history marked by German fascism and the war resulting from it...it is fairly evident that the myth is trying to deny his participation in the German war and his citizenship...the very negation of Beuys' origin in a historic period of German fascism affirms every aspect of his work as being totally dependant on, and deriving from, that period.[157]

But what had prompted Buchloh to make such an attack? The answer lies in the tradition from whence Buchloh had come:

> Buchloh...represents a more overtly theorised form of critical practice...[his] writings utilise a combination of Marxist, psychoanalytical and Post-Structuralist theories to assemble a kind of criticism...to debunk or rewrite mainstream art historical accounts.[158]

Much of Buchloh's criticism targeted the Beuys *persona/e*, as presented (in Beuys's defense) by Kuspit's essay, and in its title: "Between Showman and Shaman." Unable for long to resist questioning the ambiguity of the Beuys *persona/e* and personal mythology, isolated criticism like Buchloh's soon assembled as a clique of critics (particularly in America, where residual scepticism following his work there festered) targeting his artwork via his person. I have no doubt that as objective as I try to be in my research that my tone belies the appreciation I harbour for Beuys's work and aesthetic. Yet my own reservedness in the face of Buchloh's merciless savagery makes it all the more astonishing for its excess. For in time, any misgivings were couched in gentler terms, and even Buchloh himself softened his stance, albeit with the benefit of hindsight, and, naturally, it is expected that each critic bring to the argument her or his personal concerns. However I have come to appreciate those contributors who brought to the debate a more even-handed approach.

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[156] ibid , p. 28.

[157] op.cit., Buchloh. p.38

[158] Peter Suchin "Aspects of Art Criticism" *Variant* (Issue 6, Autumn, 1998) p. 68

One may concede, that yes, the confluence of Beuys the man, and his work (as initiated by his *Lebenslauf-Werklauf* narrative, in 1964) opened the floodgates for psychoanalytical interpretations of his work. However none exceeded Buchloh's dismissal. Despite desperate and varied attempts to defend Beuysian mythology and idolatry amidst further claims of fascist sympathies and implicit Wagnerism,[159] Buchloh sentenced Beuys to six years critical silence. Only with the sentence served and the silence broken did some belatedly ask the jury to reconsider:

> Should we really be so surprised by the fact that, after the dictatorially prescribed classicism of the Nazi period, a man returned home from the war and set about producing what could be called a dirty art so as to completely avoid coming into contact with a beauty that had been cruelly perverted?[160]

Sadly for Beuys, this plea was his obituary. Joseph Beuys died, on January 23, 1986.

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In returning to the scholarship, I would like to examine the shift away from the politicised interpretations of Beuys's work, and towards redefinitions, followed a somewhat schizophrenic path, necessitating a fragmented dissection of the years immediately following his death. "Posterity has already begun for Joseph Beuys," the *Frankfurter Allegmeine Zeitung* reported on February 1, 1986. The obituary continues, "Only eight days have passed since his death, but judgments and assessments are already changing."[161]

As will become evident in the following texts (where he is alternately de-politicised and re-politicised, located as German occultist and Asiatic mystic) Beuys's immediate posthumous career was a roller-coaster ride of post-secular interpretation. The changing judgments and assessments, as noted in the aforementioned obituary, came mostly

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[159] Buchloh opens the essay with an excerpt from Nietzsche regarding Wagner. "The fact that people in Germany deceive themselves concerning Wagner does not surprise me...How intimately related must Wagner be to the entire decadence of Europe for her not to have felt that he was decadent.. " op.cit., Buchloh. p. 36

[160] Obituary, *Frankfurter Allegmaine Zeitung* reproduced in *In Memoriam: Obituaries, Essays, Speeches* (Bonn: Inter Nationes, 1986) p 8.

[161] ibid., p. 5

formed by a spiritualistic re-interpretation of Beuys's life and work. Of course, spiritual reflection is a common feature of grief, but for Beuysian scholars, the re-interpretive mood signaled a concerted and voluminous task ahead.

Louwrijen Wijers, following Beuys's directives, had started her own re-interpretive quest in 1978. In 1987, upon completion, she reflected on her journey:

> Joseph...sent me to Andy Warhol with the same questions I had put to him, and...Andy sent me on to the Dalai Lama of Tibet, again with the same questions. When the answers of the Dalai Lama were so very similar to the answers Joseph Beuys had given, I wrote him a postcard from Dharamsala, India, as soon as I left the Dalai Lama's abode...I said: 'Dear Joseph, you have a brother here in the Himalayas, who thinks exactly the same way about the problems of today as you do.'[162]

Thus, that small fruit borne of the Beuys-Warhol relationship was strange fruit, indeed. Wijers' accumulation of interviews with/for Beuys were (alongside parts of Heiner Stachelhaus's immensely helpful 1987 biography) the first signs, outside the obituaries, of a de-politicisation following Beuys's passing. Wijers' good intentions, however, come across as misguided. The meetings – arranged between herself, Beuys, Andy Warhol, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama between 1978 and 1987 – appear awkwardly handled. There is no doubting Beuys's keenness to pursue "permanent co-operation"[163] with the Dalai Lama, but Wijers' pursuit of Warhol for the "trinity"[164] aroused a coolness in Beuys:

> WIJERS: Do you think that in a further stage Andy Warhol might want to cooperate?
> BEUYS: I think so...Andy has always difficulties with this kind of political activity, because he works in another kind of world...[165]

This sense that Wijers misunderstood certain integral aspects of Beuys's work meant that by the time she had met with the Dalai Lama, the trajectory of Wijers' connection between Beuys and the East was awkwardly skewed, and the conversation indecisive and stilted. In the subtext to her interview with the Dalai Lama, Wijers notes:

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[162] op. cit., Wijers. p. 7.

[163] ibid.

[164] op cit., Kuoni p. 190.

[165] ibid, p 189.

> The Dalai Lama has meanwhile taken on his lap the large catalogue of the retrospective Joseph Beuys exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York...Slowly His Holiness leafs through the big book...While turning the pages His Holiness the Dalai Lama remarks:
>
> > DALAI LAMA: There are many pictures of wastelands and destruction in here...In our mandalas there are parts that depict cemeteries to remind us of impermanence, death and so forth...
>
> He stops turning the pages, starts giving a long comment in Tibetan and eventually He closes the book while speaking.[166]

Though the Dalai Lama had indeed recognised an important feature of Beuys's aesthetic, the atmosphere recreated in the text is remarkably underwhelming. That there remains no current evidence that Beuysian-Tibetan association was formalised, or indeed pursued, suggests less the redundancy of Wijers' efforts, and more the incompatibility of the two men. It could be argued that Wijers' forcing of this inter-continental trinity impeded an accurate reading of Beuys's 'concept of Eurasia,' and (what will, in the course of this thesis' examination of Beuys's concept, become known as) his 'Eurasian aesthetic.'

For example, the Dalai Lama's request to Wijers to define certain questions according to Bön tradition reflects how very close the Dalai Lama was to reading Beuys's work in a relative language. The tradition of the indigenous Tibetan Bön religion is deeply indebted to animist and shamanist ritual, practices that fascinated Beuys. However Wijer's subsequent bemusement at the request reflects how very far Wijers was from successfully realising Beuys's Asiatic impulse. By approaching the Dalai Lama as representative of the broader Mahayana Buddhist tradition, Wijers ignores that dimension of Tibetan tradition which is most analogous with Beuys's interests. For it was on Beuys's return from duty, as reborn shaman, that he recalled this Bön-like mysticism, triggered by his experience with the Tatars in Crimea:

> Born on German soil, Joseph Beuys was reborn on Asian soil, in miraculous Crimea. As if chosen by legend, speaking from beyond the grave, Beuys was the chosen one, the one through whom the Germanic nature-culture bonding, as described by Spengler, would be brought about.[167]

Beuys's conceptual incarnation of this bonding was 'Eurasia.' With his accumulated knowledge of German Idealist and Romantic philosophy and aesthetic, and his

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[166] ibid., p. 156.

[167] op.cit, Borer p 29.

upbringing in the Rhenish Catholic tradition, Beuys had a *völkische* understanding of *Geist* prior to the war. For the rest of his post-war life, however, distinctive Asiatic impulses were related to (whether they actually occurred, or not) both his Stuka-crash and Tartar experience and a fusion of shamanic impulses. Thus Beuys's physical (German) and spiritual (Germanic) location, at the nexus of Spengler's "natural" and "civilised" worlds,[168] became sculpturally effected via shamanic aesthetic.

Though traced to the Tungu in Siberia, shamanism was practiced among peoples and cultures of the entire Arctic region and Nordic countries as well as in the central and eastern Asian region. In the context of shamanic tradition, we can see the significance of Beuys's experience:

> ...a potential shaman is marked out by a traumatic episode or illness. If she or he can bring the spirit causing this under control, and can demonstrate ecstatic states, then s/he is recognised as a shaman.[169]

What the Stuka crash in Crimea represents to Beuys's concept of 'Eurasia' is debatable. However, the resulting life-long illness and physical complications unquestionably reflect the degree of injury Beuys suffered from the crash in Crimea, and qualify him whole-heartedly for 'shamanic recognition.' Again, it is Beuys's own words – rather than Wijers' – that best realign interpretation of his work along an *evolutionary-revolutionary*[170] path, reminding the reader of the underlying metaphysical qualities of his work and:

> to stress the idea of transformation and of substance. That is precisely what the shaman does in order to bring about change and development: his nature is therapeutic. Of course the shaman can operate genuinely only in a society that is still intact because it lies in an earlier stage of development. Our society is far from intact...[171]

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[168] "It is for the Germans, a people of culture, to achieve the unity of the spirit, dissociated by Orientals, a people of nature, and by the Anglo-French and Yankee Westerners, a people of civilization.. " Oswald Spengler *Selected Essays* Translated by Donald O. White (Chicago: H. Regnery Co , 1967) p. 9.

[169] John Bowker (ed.) *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (Oxford. Oxford University Press, 1997) p.884.

[170] Joseph Beuys "I am searching for field character" op.cit., Kuoni p. 21.

[171] Joseph Beuys quoted in Donald Kuspit. "Joseph Beuys' mission" Russell Bowman (ed) *Warhol, Beuys, Polke* (Milwaukee Art Museum, 1987) p. 55

Wijers, far from illuminating Beuys's vision with her attempts to locate Beuys's Eurasian concept in Tibet (via Warhol's America), represented a revisionary dead end. It is a shame that Wijers could not build on the metaphysical qualities that link Beuys to Tibetan religion, for, despite her best intentions, Benjamin Buchloh's critique created more significant paths of revisionary discourse, because authors (like Donald Kuspit) responded to Buchloh, prompting further questions regarding the politicisation of Beuys, and a return to insightful commentary on Beuys's effectiveness as a social theorist.

Thus, in a revisionary reading of Beuys's sculpture, one can find Buchloh's influence evident (if not directly sourced), while attempts to locate Beuys in esoteric discourse are driven by readings of his shamanist tendencies or presented in John F. Moffit's Steinerian terms, rather than in those of Wijers.

3.2 Esoterica: 1988-1996

I argue in this section that although the most significant scholarly shift in interpretive reading since Buchloh's essay may be John F. Moffitt's text, *Occultism in Avant-Garde Art: The Case of Joseph Beuys*, his excessively Steinerian take on Beuys's esoteric inheritance cramps alternative readings and threatens broader understanding of Beuys's spiritual inheritance. The section also explores three essays on Beuys presented in the highly political art theory journal *October*, and exposes some of the undue biases political readings can have in light of the post-secular shifts in interpretation of Beuys's work.

Few publications can lay claim to explore one aspect of Beuys's work as thoroughly as John F. Moffitt's *Occultism in Avant-Garde Art.* Despite Moffitt's claims in the introductory pages that he deals with multiple Beuysian microcosms,[172] nearly the entire second half of the book is devoted to the relationship between Beuys and Steiner, with the first half working in preparatory tones. Indeed, by skipping to the very last sentence of the book, the reader may reveal the crux of Moffitt's argument: "To conclude, what Steiner wrote, Beuys believed."[173] One wonders if Moffitt was aware of Beuys's reservations about such conclusions, some nine years prior to the publication of *Occultism in Avant-Garde Art*:

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[172] op.cit., Moffitt p 2

[173] ibid., p. 178

> ...people try to bring up misunderstandings. Because even here in Germany there are some people only interested to get in contact with it [the Steiner-Beuys relationship] again...And even very famous critics, they are only saying: 'There is a kind of anthroposophical blah, blah, blah in it', or they are speaking about a kind of 'mysticism', because I mention the importance of Steiner...Here is a very, very, very different thing, the cultural distortion is very, very bad in some official writers, you know, who are very, very famous.[174]

There is no question that the work and teachings of Steiner impacted on Beuys, however this thesis also explores less thoroughly covered influences and receptions of Beuys's work. This decision has been further prompted by the more recent re-emergence of diverging voices. In discussion with Moffitt in July, 1997, Beuysian scholar Thorsten Scheerer[175] states:

> I point to a great difference between Steiner and Beuys: While Steiner rejected the perceptions of the exact natural sciences (he once tried to prove that Einstein's theory was wrong), Beuys emphasized that the exact natural sciences...have to be implemented into a theory of society and anthropological thinking...to shape a better structured society (social life) that will come up to aesthetic and artistic expectations...I wouldn't say that Beuys really did believe what Steiner said...So my question is: If this is true, why did Beuys rarely mention his name? [M]ost authors...make people believe that Beuys was a kind of follower of Steiner. But isn't it true that Beuys did nothing but implement Steiner's theory into his own?[176]

Moffitt and Scheerer's discussion ended amicably, even conceding to each others' interpretation. And, though the discussion itself offers limited academic value, the argument over Steiner's level of relevance in Beuysian discourse essentially contributes to Steiner's continued relevance, not only in Beuysian discourse, but also in contemporary social-aesthetic theory. Furthermore, as mentioned in the introductory passage of this chapter, recent exhibitions and texts continue to draw attention to this relationship. At the same time, however, it is implicit that there is perhaps room for a less obsessively Steinerian perspective of Beuys's *Geistesleben*. Not so for Moffit: his text contains only six

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[174] op.cit., Wijers p 54.

[175] Scheerer is editor of *Athena: The Joseph Beuys Online Guide* and webmaster at the Institute for Art History, Universität Heidelberg, Germany.

[176] Thorsten Scheerer. "Did Beuys really believe?: An email-discussion by John F. Moffitt and Thorsten Scheerer" (http.//athena.home.pages de) Thorsten Scheerer and Klaus Dieter Schonfeldt. (Mannheim: ATHENA Information Providing Service, January, 1999 Accessed 14:45, July, 2003) Paragraph 5.

references[177] to shamans and shamanism, and no reference to Christ or Christianity. Unfortunately for those seeking an integral revision of Beuys's work, Moffitt failed to recognise the importance of these key aspects of Beuys's work, particularly that concerning 'Eurasia.'

This is not to say Moffitt's contribution is of no use to the revisionary scholar. *Occultism and Avant-Garde Art* will most likely remain the definitive scholarly text on Beuys and his Steinerian inheritance for many years, and is unmatched in its academicism. And, Moffitt's conclusions are more often than not accurate, perhaps prompting the reader to ask why there is such dissuasion from his analysis in this thesis. After Buchloh's savaging of Beuys, should one not be grateful for a comprehensive and respectful dissection of his work? The answer is, of course, yes, however it is not Moffitt's conclusions that are in doubt, but the means by which he sought these conclusions. By reading Steiner into virtually every angle of Beuysian theory, the revisionary reader emerges, from reading Moffitt's book overwhelmed, and unconvinced.

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The 45th edition of art theory journal *October*, was published in the northern summer of 1988. As Moffitt had, *October*'s editors (among whom Benjamin Buchloh had now nestled) decided a critical reassessment of Beuys's work was due, and thus gave Thierry de Duve, Stefan Germer and Eric Michaud the opportunity to deliver. Received as an (perhaps appropriately) amorphous mass, the collective reassessment marked an uncertainty surrounding the man now two years deceased.

Thierry de Duve was Professor of Art History at the University of Ottowa. One can only speculate how much de Duve's removal from (United States of) American critical traditions affected his more respectful reading of Beuys's work. Of all the readings assessed in the course of writing this thesis, de Duve's neutrality aids his reading of Beuysian paradox with unmatched conviction:

> The ruler and the tramp, the king and his fool, are but one of the bi-cephalic avatars of the artist. There are many others of them that also show, on the one hand, his indefatigable evangelism, his political combativeness, his pedagogical joy, his revolutionary or evolutionary optimism, his

[177] As indicated in the Index, op.cit , Moffitt pp. 225-230.

> propensity to take the role of the leader; and, on the other hand, his mystical archaism, his high sense of the pathetic in constant oscillation between farce and tragedy, his tendency to play the victim, his empathy for all the anomic and sacrificial figures of humanity.[178]

Though de Duve's entitling of the essay "Joseph Beuys, or The Last of the Proletarians," may have been welcomed by Buchloh and his cohorts, the title belies the text. For the *proletariat* in which de Duve locates Beuys is an alternative *proletariat*, one that

> transcodes *the bohemian* as a social type that excludes *the bourgeois* but includes all the rest of humanity suffering from industrial capitalism...But *the proletarian* is a construction no less ideological – or mythical – of the same personage or social type that *the bohemian* expresses in the discourse of art or literature. Simply it expresses it in the discourse of political economy.[179]

De Duve's effective translation of Marxian terminology to Beuysian not only transcends the political ("Marx calls [the] universal faculty of producing value *labor power*; Beuys calls it *creativity*."[180]) but locates Beuys in a greater tradition of emancipatory theorists:

> ...that which Beuys promised by creativity is what all of artistic modernity never ceased to promise, to hope for, to invoke as the emancipatory horizon of its achievement. "Everyone is an artist." Rimbaud already said it and Novalis already thought it long ago. The students of 1968, in Paris, in California, and gathered around Beuys in Düsseldorf, proclaimed it once again and wrote it on the walls. It always meant, and this since the German romantics: "power to the imagination."[181]

One might consider de Duve's reading as the closest any such theorist comes to bringing Beuys and Adorno together, even if his animation recalls the disparity between the two men in the activism of 1968. In a further attempt to translate Marxian and Beuysian ideas, de Duve reads Beuys's *creativity* as currency in his *political economy*. In doing so de Duve becomes the first to recognise Beuys's *Politik* as existing in a sort of parallel universe to those political traditions in which previous readers of the Beuysian *Politik* had

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[178] Thierry de Duve. "Joseph Beuys, or The Last of the Proletarians" *October* 45 (Summer, 1988) pp. 49-50.

[179] ibid., p.52

[180] ibid., p. 55

[181] ibid.

imagined. This methodology is supported by Piero Formica,[182] former economic planner for the Italian Communist Party, who stated:

> Few understand that Joseph Beuys was not – and never claimed to be – an economist; however his determination to have creativity recognised as part of the political economy underpinned his 'quasi-economics.'[183]

As though responding to Wijers' (as yet unpublished) efforts, de Duve uses his understanding of Beuys's 'quasi-economics' to dismiss notions of Beuys-Warhol compatibility:

> In the art of the last twenty years, only Warhol equals Beuys in legend-value – that is, media value – and the shadow of them both hovers equally over the art of the younger generation. But Beuys is a hero and Warhol is a star...Beuys, like Marx a bourgeois German, wanted to incarnate the proletarian; Warhol, an American immigrant of working-class origins, wanted to be a machine. At the centre of all these oppositions is the fact that Beuys based art on will and thus on a principle of production, and Warhol on desire and thus on a principle of consumption; that Beuys believed in creativity and Warhol did not; and that for Beuys art was labor while for Warhol it was commerce.[184]

This emphasis on the principle of production and the processes of creativity are critical to this thesis' claims regarding the relationship between concept and form. This passage thus succinctly draws Beuys as central to the claim as representing the qualities that art, and artists, possess in the consideration of philosophy. As an aside, the difference presented between Beuys and Warhol here should not be read as a refutation of Warhol in this thesis' terms; Warhol's own particular and idiosyncratic engagement with the production of art is just as valuable to philosophical readings. Naturally such readings will be contextualized, although consider Daniel Birnbaum's review of Arthur C. Danto's monograph *Andy Warhol*.[185] Birnbaum considers Danto's reference to "heavy thinkers such as Hegel and Wittgenstein" as "not surprising."[186] However, Birnbaum inadvertently

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[182] Piero Formica met Beuys during "The 100 days of the Free International University" at Kassel, Germany (June 24 – October 1, 1977) after being invited to participate in the 'Periphery Workshop' which discussed "The future of small countries and areas of society emarginated from political power." op cit., Tisdall. *Joseph Beuys* p. 260.

[183] Piero Formica. In interview with author. July 28, 2002.

[184] op.cit., de Duve p. 62.

[185] Arthur C. Danto. *Andy Warhol* (London, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009)

[186] Daniel Birnbaum "Saint Andy" *Artforum* November, 2009 p 65

confirms the place this thesis occupies in the reconsideration of the relationship between art and philosophy by considering it "odd...that he expects Warhol to elucidate their thinking rather than vice versa."[187]

In complete contrast to de Duve, Eric Michaud (then Professor of Art History at the University of Strasbourg) begins his article, "The Ends of Art according to Beuys" by reading Beuys's contribution to art history and theory as apostolic. Michaud's alternative to de Duve's understanding of Beuys's great catchphrase "Everyone is an artist," as founded in "man's possibility of self-determination"[188] is less definitive, but more suited to the language of Michaud's essay, which, in its opening paragraph alone, refers to: Beuys's desire "to make art the instrument of resurrection"; his "disciples"; his role in spreading "Christianity's faith in the possibility of each human being's rebirth"; and to his role as an "apostle."[189]

From this Christocentric entry, Michaud's hermeneutic key undoes Beuys's work according to the notion of *Gestaltung*:

> The *Gestaltung* of the world is thus a duty...to reform a sick world. But if the *gestaltung displaying itself* is the resurrection of meaning, it is by the same token, for Beuys, the resurrection of Christ displaying himself in his work.[190]

Though Michaud translates Beuys with the same conviction, de Duve's politicised reading draws a different conclusion than Michaud's Christianised approach, which ties nation to spirit, recalling Buchloh's critical formula. Here, Michaud quotes Beuys:

> I thus set myself off on a search...and I found some connections that look like this: in the German people...you find the force of resurrection. You also find it, of course, in other peoples; but our strength will unfold within a radically renewed social fabric.[191]

Michaud makes some extraordinary claims based on (others') interviews with Beuys in which he makes further national-spiritual connections, the most serious of which is his

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[187] ibid

[188] op. cit., Michaud p. 37.

[189] ibid.

[190] ibid., p. 41.

[191] ibid., p. 43

claim that 'Social art is the new resurrection of Christ, and it is in Germany that Christ must again be reborn..."[192] However, Michaud saves his most direct claim until last:

> [Beuys's] "social sculpture" can, I believe, mean only the subjugation of the real world and real men, which it reduces to the mere instruments of its free exercise...thus there is no way for it to "render the concept of politics void" or to blend with it without at the same time identifying itself with this self-propaganda and this self-propagation that was, more than all else, the emblem of the Nazi regime...[193]

There is no such piecemeal unraveling of intent in Stefan Germer's "Haacke, Broodthaers and Beuys." Germer's straightforward narrative describes an incident in which Beuys's indifference to criticism is exposed and questioned by fellow artist Marcel Broodthaers upon his decision to exhibit at the Guggenheim Museum. Broodthaers had withdrawn from the exhibition of Düsseldorf based artists in solidarity with their mutual friend, Hans Haacke, for his exclusion from the show. Haacke had "refused to exclude two documentations of Manhattan real estate holdings and a poll of the museum's visitors"[194] and was thus given notice by the museum's director, Thomas Messer:

> We have held consistently that under our Charter we are pursuing esthetic and educational objectives that are self-sufficient and without ulterior motive...It is well understood that art may have social and political consequences, but these, we believe, are furthered by indirection and by the generalised, exemplary force that works of art may exert upon the environment, not as you propose, by using political means to achieve political ends...[195]

Again, with hindsight, we might consider the director's decision bound by protocol to the detriment of Haacke's progressive work. I wonder now what may have transpired had Haacke been allowed to exhibit – not only in terms of the exhibition's outcome, but in Beuys's relationship with his peers. I concur with Broodthaers, who described art, under these conditions, as "a prisoner of its phantasms and its function as magic; it hangs on our bourgeois walls as a sign of power."[196] Germer's location of Beuys's indifference in the face of his colleagues' solidarity marks his scepticism:

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[192] ibid., p 44

[193] ibid.

[194] Stefan Germar. "Haacke, Broodthaers, Beuys" *October* 45 (Summer, 1988) p. 64.

[195] ibid

[196] ibid., p. 65.

> When the show...opened at the Guggenheim, it became clear how quickly and easily Beuys's political messages could be absorbed by the institution. Beuys showed a primitive flag and a fur trunk...and an object that detailed the social program of his *Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* (organisation for Direct Democracy through referendum). Both pieces, which the artist explicitly characterized as political, were shown in the very museum that had banned Haacke's work because of its political nature.[197]

The question thus became one of Beuys's loyalties to truly progressive and politically radical art, diffusing any potential the work shown might have possessed. As if descending into farce, Germer continues by describing Broodthaers' peculiar adoption of historical personae for the purpose of communicating with Beuys. In one letter to Beuys, Broodthaers cast himself as composer Jacques Offenbach,[198] in opposition to Beuys, poignantly cast as Richard Wagner. It is, according to Germer, Broodthaers' belief that "the situation [with Haacke, Beuys and the Guggenheim] had an exemplary character," and should thus be discussed – albeit peculiarly – rather than be reason for Broodthaers pursuing "a direct polemic against Beuys."[199] Broodthaers' generosity, however, is not shared by Germer, who (after somehow weaving Steinerien anthroposophy and Fluxus-theory into Beuys's political fabric) concludes:

> In no respect do the programs of Beuys's organizations correspond to political realities...Taken as a whole, the mixture of Steiner's ideas, the Fluxus concept of extended creativity, and the slogans of the extraparliamentary opposition formed a less coherent political program than a monumental apology for the artist.[200]

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It is hardly surprising that Beuys's transition into the 1990s was further marked by critical silence. The seriousness and academic quality of Moffitt's text overwhelmed all other attempts to portray Beuys as anything other than Steinerian, while the combined *October*

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[197] ibid., p. 66.

[198] "Like Wagner, Offenbach operated in the reactionary period following the defeat of the 1848 revolution, but unlike Wagner, Offenbach could not take refuge to a mythical past, since his genre – the operetta – required cooperation with existing forces and conditions." ibid., p. 74.

[199] ibid., p. 66

[200] ibid., p 68.

essays covered such a perplexing range of conceptual reference that Beuysian theory has been locked within the confines of their critical maze ever since. The increasing popularity of retrospectives and specialist exhibitions (and the increasing sales of their catalogues) throughout the last years of the 1980s and the first years of the 1990s indicated that Joseph Beuys remained both credited for his contribution to art, and popular, if not critically relevant. However it was not until 1996 that Joseph Beuys re-emerged as the subject of scholarly critique.

3.3 Resurrection: 1996 -

In 1996, the critical silence again gave way to a cacophony of Beuysian revision. In the introduction to *Joseph Beuys: Christus DENKEN/THINKING Christ* Friedhelm Mennekes reflects on the progress of his work with Beuys:

> Since my first meeting with Beuys in 1984, I have tried to play my part in...putting together the full picture of his influence and work [in] theology...it has literally become a 'work in progress' and there is no end in sight. The essays which have been revised and brought together here for this occasion, bear witness to the various stages of my desire to understand and engage with his work. They mark out my progress and constitute a personal interim-report.[201]

This final section of this section traces Beuys's re-emergence on the critical scene as initiated by Mennekes' 'interim-report,' assessing Beuys's Christian inheritance and its relevance to his art and in his life.

One can only speculate on the reasoning behind the timing for the publication of *Christus DENKEN/THINKING Christ.* Why did Mennekes feel the need to present an 'interim-report' in 1996, rather than develop and complete his work at a later date? Was there some sense of urgency, created by the prolonged interpretive silence? Mennekes' modest description of his contribution belies a text unlike others in its ability to recognise its own limitations. The gift of hindsight and Mennekes' familiarity with the readings used in this thesis meant he was able to dissect these readings according to their time-worn accuracies and inaccuracies. Nevertheless, Mennekes is not entirely without fault. Indeed,

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[201] op. cit., Mennekes. p 4

one senses from his opening interview with Beuys, that Mennekes' initial interpretive direction did not correspond with Beuys's.

The first misunderstanding is Mennekes' reading of Beuys's early sculptural rendering of the Cross[202] as relevant to Beuys's later Christian understanding. This is exposed in Mennekes' opening statement to Beuys:

> Joseph Beuys, your name has been recognized in association with...a number of media and with installations...but when I consider the crosses and relevant religious elements that are found...then it is really seeing another side of Beuys...

Beuys then corrects Mennekes:

> ...What you might say is they were only attempts...This series of attempts of approaching the spiritual realm on the basis of traditional subjects exhausted itself already around 1954 and that time actually marks the end of them. It became clear to me that what is Christian is not reached through depictions of the figure of Christ.[203]

Mennekes' decision to include the unedited conversation was most likely made for the reader's benefit, so these interpretive mistakes are exposed for discarding. In dissuading Mennekes' reflection on these 'traditional' works, Beuys's location in modern Christian expression is questioned. Beuys tempts Mennekes into discussing Christianity's problems in spiritual transmission, and the qualities of sacramental practice, prompting Mennekes to ask: "You mean the church hasn't been able to present what is essentially Christian as sacramental in our time?" To which Beuys responds:

> Sacramental presence is good. The sacraments bring forth the Christian substance; they put into consciousness a real presence of this fundamental strength. They were very successful in doing so at a period when faith was still a means of understanding. But in the Modern Age where humanity has had the experience of materialism, also in scientific terms, and people have shifted all their abilities to the intellect, faith is no longer a means of understanding.[204]

Having alerted Mennekes to his percieved need for an alternative interpretation of Christian essence, Beuys realigns the course of the interview, and indeed the entire book.

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[202] Beuys's sculptural experimentation with cruciforms took place in the years between 1950-1954.

[203] op cit., Mennekes. p 26.

[204] ibid., p.30.

Mennekes' interview with Beuys is followed by an interview between Beuys and Elisabeth Pfister[205] in which Beuys's central concern regarding his Christian expression is revealed. During the interview, Beuys begins to express this concern, directed at both institutionalised Christian theology, and the expression of Christ as a historical figure. Pfister recalls a speech Mennekes made at the opening of a Beuys exhibition, in which he located Beuys's works "within the tradition of Christian thought."[206] Pfister asks if, in light of Beuys's revelations concerning Christian thought, Beuys minded Mennekes' interpretation. Beuys answers:

> No, no that does not bother me at all. I only hope that it is so. The idea of the individual is inseparably fused with that of Christ...This does not, however, mean that the individual has to admit to what has developed historically out of the institutional work of the church. And in that respect, I am a great opponent of all churches, of denominational Christendom.[207]

What emerges from this discussion is Beuys's appreciation for Christ's mythical role as a healer among the suffering, and a respect for this power of faith. Beuys's recollection of this notion is not driven by the historical Christ, but the 'Christ Impulse'[208] within us all:

> I have been opposed to the idea that Christ was merely a historical figure, a historical event providing exemplary forms of moralist behaviour...I've been strongly opposed to this form of Social Democratic Christianity, be it Dorothy Sölles, Karl Barth's or Rudolph Bultmann's theologies...I was concerned with the reality of [Christ's] energy as continually present and as a growing presence.

In recognising the mythology of Christ, Beuys clarifies his own mythology according to the ritual of healing. This is another take on Kuspit's earlier response to Buchloh's criticism of Beuysian myth-making, and also directs Beuys's quasi-Christian metaphorical references, like the wound: perhaps the most familiar representation of suffering and healing in Beuysian discourse, and one closely linked with Beuys's conception of Christ.

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[205] Elisabeth Pfister was editor at the *Hessischer Rundfunk*. Pfister reported on the opening of an exhibition of Beuys's religious work titled *Menschenbild-Christusbild* which opened in the Church of St. Markus in Nied, Frankfurt (Main), November 10, 1984 This interview took place a short time after the opening ibid., pp. 80-89.

[206] ibid., p. 80.

[207] ibid.

[208] "The term *Christ Impulse* is not to be found in the classical Christology of the Churches...In Beuys's case the term's real meaning [is] *Every human activity is accompanied by this higher self that resides within human beings and where Christ is to be found.*" ibid., p 196.

Used as the initiation of Beuysian mythology in his *Lebenslauf/Werklauf* narrative, the wound simultaneously represents life and death; suffering and healing. Suffering – personal, national, universal – was Beuys's concern, healing his creative task, and some may regard his aesthetic as wound-like: uncomfortable viewing, but calling desperately for attention. Though other elements of Beuys's work dealt with healing, none treated the Western (or specifically – in the 'Eurasian' context – European) wound with the conviction of Christian essence. Beuys's shamanic alchemy and animism, for example, presented him with a broadened spiritual palette, but for the healing of society's wounds, he turned to his Christian heart. For which figure, asks French scholar Alain Borer, "is a supreme representation of both suffering and healing?" Without further digression, he responds: "Christ, with whom Beuys the shaman strives to identify."[209]

The complexities of Beuys's Christianity are too entwined in personal interpretation to be so easily unraveled within the confines of this text, however the most significant sense one gets from Mennekes' collaboration with Beuys is Beuys's determination to remove himself from denominational Christianity (at one stage, in the interview with Pfister, Beuys bluntly states: "I have been fighting throughout my entire life against both Catholicism and Protestantism."[210]) and return to some notion of original Christian spirituality. This, Beuys insists, is a Christianity in which Christ, as a human being, is the only representation of God we can relate to (...the nice thesis "God is dead" seems accurate from this point of view..."[211]). When Beuys's 'thesis' is socially contemporised, this 'Christ-Impulse' represents liberation:

> All systems are oppressive because they are abstract and concerned only with how a minority can govern...There can never be repression as long as you are a thinker...The original idea of Christianity 'I will make you free' had to do with changing the world, before it was institutionalized.[212]

What emerges from Mennekes' interviews and collective research is Beuys's determined separation from modern Christianity's institutionalisation. It is this distinction that

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[209] op. cit., Borer p. 31.

[210] op cit., Mennekes p 80.

[211] ibid., p. 30.

[212] Caroline Tisdall. "The Energy Plan for the Western Man" op. cit., Kuoni pp 11-12.

determined Borer's peculiar definition (*cathology*) of Beuys's Christian inheretance, and marked Beuys's fascination with the primal origins of Christian belief – recognised as an 'impulse' inherent in all individuals – as central to Beuys's work. Beuys's interest in the nature of Christ, as distinct yet inseperable from that of God, may – though classifiable in Christological discourse – be alternatively described, for the purpose of revisionary contribution, as *Christ*-ian.

By the turn of the 21st century, Mennekes particularist reading had given way to publications gathering collected essays reconsidering or revising interpretation of Beuys's work. Foremost among these is *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*; particularly important for its inclusion of an essay by Benjamin Buchloh. The essay maps the Beuysian legacy, but most significantly, revisits Buchloh's 1980 review, one which, he notes generated "furore...among admirers of Beuys in the States" and "rage...in Germany."[213] While he appears, at first, grateful for the opportunity to "make good on some of the mistakes"[214] apparent in his original critique, there emerges little real sense of remorse other than a concession to the significance of Beuys's historical position since. Most importantly, for this thesis, Buchloh's essay bring to the attention of the reader the historico-cultural and theoretical association proposed by this thesis:

> Arendt and Adorno place the Holocaust as the irreversible caesura from which one will have to rethink culture at large. Clearly, therefore, it should not surprise us that readings of Beuys, layered as they now are...gradually shift further and further in this direction...[215]

Beyond the literary revisiting of the Beuysian oeuvre, major exhibitions were becoming increasingly prevalent, none more so than the Tate Modern's ten-room survey, *Joseph Beuys: Actions, Vitrines, Environments.*[216] This exhibition brought Beuys to the attention of British audiences for the first time in a major retrospective exhibition, and prompted the publication of *Joseph Beuys: The Reader*[217] in 2007, the first such introductory presentation of the artist in a literary format usually reserved for theorists. How dramatically this surge

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[213] Benjamin Buchloh "Reconsidering Beuys Once Again" *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy* (New York. Distributed Art Publishers, 2001) p. 75.

[214] ibid.

[215] ibid., p 76

[216] Exhibition at the Tate Modern, London. 4 February – 2 May 2005.

[217] Claudia Mesch and Viola Michely. *Joseph Beuys: The Reader* (London: I B Taurus & Co Ltd, 2007)

in interest and the shifting terrain of his reception will alter remains to be seen, however it is clear that the reconsideration of his work in philosophical terms is timely.

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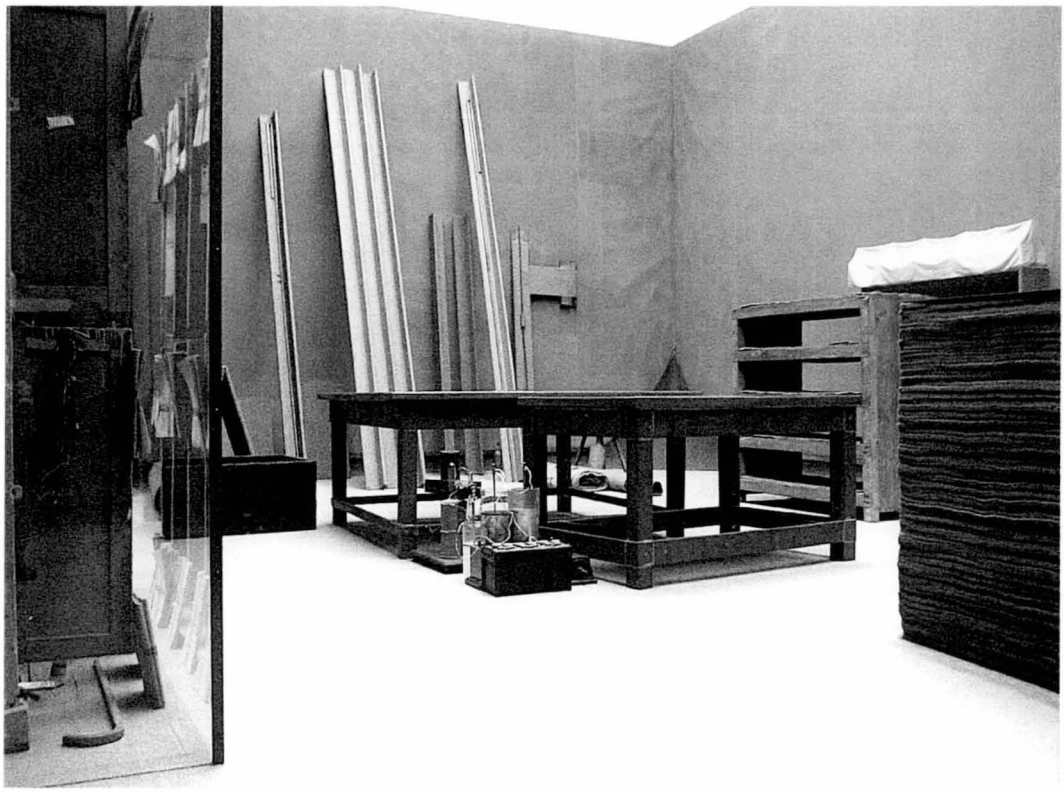
What these reading offer, retrospectively (and irrespective of their author's agendas) to the understanding of Beuys's life and work leading up to *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, is insight into the impulses that drove Beuys's thought. Naturally, the quest to engage with the conceptualisation and construction of the *Block Beuys* benefits from exposure to this critical dissection by presenting the question others have asked of Beuys's work and the background to its production. In summary, this section has, in its choice of readings, exposed a cross-section of critical response to Beuys's work along theoretical lines. Though reference is made only intermittently to Beuys's actual artwork, understanding these diverging critiques – and the relationship I have forged between Beuys and Adorno – will provide a strong foundation upon which to build a revisionary reading of his work and its potential within contemporary discourse. This section has developed, in the course of assessing the strengths and weaknesses of these critical readings, an understanding of the issues upon which Beuys is most thoroughly questioned. As Beuys's sculptural theory is inseparable from his social theory, the dissection of criticism presented herein and the renewed understanding developed from it forms the basis of the revision of the single Beuys sculpture in the next chapter.

4. ONE WORK CONSIDERED

(Fig. 4) Joseph Beuys. Room 1, *Block Beuys.* Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt.



(Fig. 5) Joseph Beuys. Room 2, *Block Beuys.* Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt.

With critical insight to the life, work, interpretation and reception of Joseph Beuys, we now enter the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt, take the stairs to the third floor, and walk into the *Block Beuys.* This section will guide us through these rooms, before descending on a vitrine in Room 5, titled *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964.* With an enriched understanding of the greater Beuysian project, as explicated in the previous section, we can re-imagine Beuys's thought – here as form – wending through Adorno's aesthetics; building not only a new representation of the post-war German condition, but a means by which we may further consider both art and philosophy anew, from within each-other.

To a degree, Joseph Beuys initiated the theoretical form of the central tenet of this thesis: that art has unique powers *as* philosophy. This thesis presents the *Block Beuys*, and, in particular *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, as representative of these powers. Beuys demanded that this be understood as a (if not *the*) philosophical force unto itself:

> We must probe (theory of knowledge) the moment of origin of free individual productive potency (creativity). We then reach the threshold where human being experiences himself primarily as a spiritual being, where his supreme achievements (work of art), his active thinking, his active

> feeling, his active will, and their higher forms, can be apprehended as sculptural generative means...[218]

Beuys's 'apprehending' of this primal 'productive potency' (one assumes before the systematic consumption of this potency at the hands of a regimented, enlightened modernity) is an essential trigger for his theoretical contribution to the dissection of the post-war German condition. It also appears as an inversion of Adorno's thought that "theories that bear a systematic intention must collapse in fragments in order to release their truth content."[219] For Beuys, the practical implications are expressed by way of a radical utopianism, based on a principle of widened definition of art and creativity:

> Only on condition of a radical widening of definition will it be possible for art and activities related to art to provide evidence that art is now the only evolutionary-revolutionary power. Only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system that continues to totter along the deathline...Only a conception of art revolutionized to this degree can turn into a politically productive force, coursing through each person.[220]

Though his utopianism may be a little harder to detect amidst the intricately formed dialectic, Adorno holds it close to his heart. Even as a self-refuting Hegelian-Marxist, Adorno's work is so imbued with this idealism that he seems eternally, referentially bound to their philosophy. Beuys, on the other hand, had the problematic (and oft-questioned) position – as *perpetrator* – concerning utopian idealism in Germany *after Auschwitz*. That both Adorno and Beuys managed to sustain their respective hopes while launching a broad, critical and/or aesthetic attack on the foundations of the very culture from whence they had come is a considerable feat in itself. To further consider how they dissected the flaws within their own traditions, and produced work that considered not only the aesthetic challenge of 'ugliness' and 'dissonance,' but also the ontological repercussions, is to consider a, if not *the*, critical conception for all subsequent aesthetic philosophy. To be idealistic within this world necessitated a very cautious appreciation of the new conditions, concurrent with the critical dissection of the past. Thus, it could be said that this new idealism was negated/underscored by the Beuysian catch-cry that represented action, trauma and healing: "Show your wound."

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[218] op. cit., Kuoni p. 22.

[219] op cit., Adorno *Aesthetic Theory* p 460.

[220] op cit., Beuys "I am searching for field character" in Kuoni. p. 16.

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> 'Whether art will survive...is anybody's guess'. Aesthetics, in any case, 'is powerless to avert its becoming a necrologue of art'. Its role for Adorno, one might say, following Hegel, is simply 'to comprehend what is'. And what is at present is a situation in which the 'affirmative essence' of art as an autonomous sphere of value has become so 'insufferable' in the context of an unfree society that 'true' art (an art which is true to the idea of truth) has been forced to 'challenge its own essence' and to revolt against itself. It does this, according to Adorno, 'by developing the aesthetic concept of anti-art'. From now on, he argues, 'no art will be conceivable without the moment of anti-art'.[221]

As noted previously, the third chapter of *Aesthetic Theory* – 'On the Categories of the Ugly, the Beautiful and Technique' – offers an integral conceptual and theoretical insight to Beuys's aesthetic, distanced somewhat from the Marxian concerns of production and consumption, and imbued more with the projection and emergence of aesthetic antitheses as part of the new aesthetic 'condition.' In this antithetical space Adorno situates *the ugly* as an important conceptual counter to the traditions of philosophical aesthetics, bound as they are in concerns for *the beautiful.* Though true, this is, in the contemporary climes, a simplism; one Adorno dismisses as "a platitude."[222] Adorno regales the reader with historical reference to "the fauns and sileni of Hellenism"[223] as exemplary of the traditions of portraying *the ugly*, before recognizing the ongoing impact of the grotesque realism that emerged from within late 19th century and 20th century literature:

> The harmonistic view of the ugly was voided in modern art, and something qualitatively new emerged. The anatomical horror in Rimbaud and Benn, the physically revolting and repellent in Beckett, the scatological traits of many contemporary dramas, have nothing in common with the rustic uncouthness of seventeenth-century Dutch paintings.[224]

Were this thesis more concerned with literary aesthetics it would do justice to the authors and present a more comprehensive overview of their work; however for the sake of brevity and impact, these select works explain Adorno's thread. Adorno points

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[221] Peter Osborne. "Adorno and Modernism" *The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin* Andrew Benjamin (ed) (London: Routlegde, 1989) p. 24.

[222] op. cit., Adorno *Aesthetic Theory* p. 60.

[223] ibid

[224] ibid., p. 61

specifically to Rimbaud, Benn and Beckett.[225] All, in a sense, pre-empted the same impulse, albeit uninformed (with Beckett's exception[226]) by World Wars:

Jadis, si je me souviens bien, ma vie était un festin où s'ouvraient tous les coeurs, où tous les vins coulaient.
Un soir, j'ai assis la Beauté sur mes genoux. - Et je l'ai trouvée amère. - Et je l'ai injuriée.
Je me suis armé contre la justice.
Je me suis enfui. Ô sorcières, ô misère, ô haine, c'est à vous que mon trésor a été confié!
Je parvins à faire s'évanouir dans mon esprit toute l'espérance humaine. Sur toute joie pour l'étrangler j'ai fait le bond sourd de la bête féroce.

(A while back, if I remember right, my life was one long party where all hearts were open wide, where all wines kept flowing.
One night, I sat Beauty down on my lap – And I found her galling – And I roughed her up.
I armed myself against justice.
I ran away. O witches, O misery, O hatred, my treasure's been turned over to you!
I managed to make every trace of human hope vanish from my mind. I pounced on every joy like a ferocious animal eager to strangle it.)

- Arthur Rimbaud
Une Saison en Enfer (1873)

Der einsame Backzahn einer Dirne,
die unbekannt verstorben war,
trug ein Goldplombe.
Die übrigen waren wie auf stille Verabredung
ausgegangen.
Den schlug der Leichendiener sich heraus,
versetzte ihn und ging für tanzen.
Denn, sagte er,
nur Erde sole zur Erde werden.

(The lone molar of a whore
who had died unknown
had a gold filling.

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[225] ibid, pp. 39-42.

[226] Beckett particularly, was noted for his association with the French Resistance. Adorno's reference is perhaps more prevalent in the context of Beckett's absurdism, rather than his later minimalism. The works of Benn are at their most grotesque prior to the outbreak of the First World War. See Walter Herbert Sokel *The writer in extremis: expressionism in twentieth-century German literature* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1959)

As if by silent agreement
the others had fallen out.
But this one the morgue attendant knocked out
and pawned to go dancing.
For, he said,
only earth should return to earth.)

- Gottfried Benn *Kreislauf* (1912)

... you would do better, at least no worse, to obliterate texts than to blacken margins, to fill in the holes of words till all is blank and flat and the whole ghastly business looks like what it is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery.

- Samuel Beckett *Molloy* (1951)

Despite the exemplary aesthetic of these works, Adorno's constitution of 'modernity' in art is sadly limited; often to a few usual suspects. In Adorno's defense, his point remains: the new aesthetic condition required a re-assessment of what role anti-aesthetic impulses have in our understanding of, and engagement in, the world. Knowing Adorno's narrow conception of art (and here I present a crucial point concerning the shortcomings of *textual philosophy*[227]), it perhaps comes as less surprising that there is no record of Beuys and Adorno meeting, nor either man mentioning the other in any public utterance.[228] *Aesthetic Theory* is littered with examples of Adorno's narrow conception of art obstructing certain potential in thought:

...the liberation of the forces of production could extend into other dimensions than exclusively that of the quantitative growth of production. There are intimations of this when functional buildings are adapted to the forms and contours of the landscape, as well as when building materials have originated into the surrounding landscape, as for instance with chateaux and castles.[229]

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[227] By this, I mean specifically written language, but may also refer to spoken language.

[228] Indeed, there remains, to my knowledge and validated by my research, only one text where both are named in the title. This one case is Hermann Pfutze "Von Adorno du Beuys" *Kunstforum International* (Volume 100, 1977) pp. 242-252. Elsewhere, Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes' paper "Unity in Diversity Through Art? Joseph Beuys' Models of Cultural Dialogue" (http://www feem it/NR/rdonlyres/C47F6623-18D1-4BA1-8706-C5E80A694A2E/1968/6008 pdf) has noted in its abstract that "Relevant theories include Eco's "openness" and Adorno's *negative* and *positive* representation, since Beuys's work's relationship to the Holocaust and trauma turns out to be central." (Accessed 14:12, November 4, 2009)

[229] op. cit., Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory* p. 61.

It seems a little unfair to pick on this trait alone, however it does emerge as an 'aesthetic' flaw in Adorno's work. Often, when reading Adorno, the intensity of his concept is muted by the stuffiness of his application, evident here in his quaint, but at the same time sadly misplaced, reference to 'chateaux and castles.' This recurs in his writings on music. Adorno's harshest critics attack along musical lines, bringing up his dislike for jazz and contemporary composition. The criticism usually focused on Adorno's limited scope:

> To the end of his days, when speaking of jazz, Adorno clung to the technical vocabulary he had developed to analyse the German commercial music of the 1920s; and as his analytical terminology remained the same, so did his conclusions.[230]

> His defense of modernism is always based on the same figures: first and foremost Kafka and Schoenberg, and then Joyce, Proust, Valery, Wedekind, Trakl, Borchardt, Klee, Kandinsky, Masson, and Picasso; his philosophy of music reposes almost exclusively on the Vienna School (Schoenberg, Webern and Berg). When Adorno speaks of modernity, he is referring in fact to the period from 1910 to 1930, and especially to expressionism, and thus to the moment considered by the Situationists to be the pinnacle and end of the unity of art. With the exception of Beckett and a very few others, artists and tendencies that emerged after the Second World War receive scarcely more consideration from him than they do from the Situationists. Even though he had twenty-four years to observe post-war artists, Adorno either ignored them, as he did Yves Klein, Pollock or Fluxus, or condemned their efforts, as in the case of the "happening." [231]

Thus, I suggest that any attempt to culturally validate or make-contemporary Adorno's troubled text must involve external parties. Here, I present Joseph Beuys's *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* as ideal. In this instance, forging a partnership between these very different works meant serendipitously entering *Aesthetic Theory* through the third chapter: 'On the Categories of the Ugly, the Beautiful and Technique.'

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We know that Beuys was not without his detractors; his wartime role as pilot in the Luftwaffe meant he inherently represented the force that brought to Europe its darkest

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[230] J Bradford Robinson. "The Jazz Essays of Theodor Adorno: Some Thoughts on Jazz Reception in Weimar Germany" *Popular Music* (Volume 13, no. 1, January, 1994) pp. 12-13.

[231] Anselm Jappe and Donald Nicholson-Smith "Sic Transit Gloria Artis: 'The End of Art' for Theodor Adorno and Guy Debord" *SubStance* (Volume 28, no. 3, Issue 90, 1999 - Special Issue: Guy Debord) p. 121

hour, and, despite struggling for much of his post-war life with *the guilt of the perpetrator*, it was a role of great misgiving. For Beuys (as was the case for all German citizens who had been either actively or passively complicit in the Nazi war effort), the finely balanced scales of remorse and contempt could be tipped by the slightest errancy in word or action. How this is aesthetically incarnate is a matter for contention, however the impact of Buchloh's high profile critical damnation was so great as to bring into question Beuys's entire project.

The objective of this chapter is to be neither clarion of acclaim nor disapproval, but to consider Beuys's work as a philosophical contemplation of a particular aspect of the post-Holocaust human condition. Adorno is often cited for his determination to address this condition, and the role of culture and cultural production in its rehabilitation. Herein the text dedicated to *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* will dwell on the construction and symbolism of the work, and its relationship to Beuys own thoughts and actions. Adorno's contribution completes, I believe, a fascinating philosophical 'constellation.' Within this intricate framework, Beuys's 'staging of life' and 'showing of wounds' is prevalent:

> ...if Beuys deserves a long-standing place in the history of art, his sculptural achievement and artistic influence must be considered significant; otherwise, the details of his life and career will permanently consign him to the role of merely a fascinating, particularly German cultural personage. To begin to understand Beuys's approach and to characterize his aesthetic legacy, it is crucial to recognize that he approached both his life and his art as one endeavor, and constantly staged both aspects.[232]

I consider *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* essential to understanding the relationship between Beuys's life and his work, but also the importance of *the site*. Completing the 'trinity' of Beuys's essential creative and aesthetic components, the importance of *the site* (location) in the creation and installation of Beuys's work is particularly significant.[233] This is continues to be the case in the posthumous re-installation of his work, as was discovered by Sean Rainbird, Chief Curator at London's Tate Modern, and principal

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[232] Mark Rosenthal. *Joseph Beuys Actions, Vitrines, Environments* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004) p. 10

[233] Perhaps the most poignant examples of this are the projects Beuys undertook in Ireland (see Norman Rosenthal and Heiner Bastian's catalogue for *Joseph Beuys: A Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland* New York: Art Books Ltd , 1999) and the United States (see Kuoni).

curator of the gallery's recent Beuys retrospective *Joseph Beuys: Actions, Vitrines, Environments*:

> It is now an unavoidable aspect of making Joseph Beuys exhibitions that the question of creating an ensemble of works, even the siting of individual works, introduces a challenge not encountered by exhibitions of many other artists, living or dead. During his lifetime, Beuys treated his exhibitions as flexible propositions, and treated each opportunity to exhibit his work as a dynamic interaction between artist, object and space.[234]

In order to emphasise the importance of space – particularly the space in which the Block is housed – I have chosen to enter this section as I entered the research fieldwork: with my impressions upon entering the Hessisches Landesmuseum, as recognition of how important this location was for Beuys.

4.1 The site: Hessisches Landesmuseum

The Hessisches Landesmuseum is one of Germany's oldest public museums, yet my immediate impressions recalled those of entering regional museums elsewhere; the overwhelming sense that (with certain exception) the greatness and grandeur of the major metropolitan museum had leeched their regional counterpart of significant artefacts and critical collections. Certainly, the eclecticism of the collection[235] hinted at efforts to fill every recess with displays: medieval ivory work competed with art nouveau artefacts in one room, geological and palaeontological exhibitions sat alongside mineralogy and zoology in another. Relics from the Græco-Roman period to the twentieth century were scattered somewhat illogically across rooms and levels, while

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[234] Sean Rainbird. "At the End of the Twentieth Century· Installing After the Act" op cit, Rosenthal. p. 136.

[235] Reflected in the following reviews: " ..many critics find the dusty setting ideal. The Landesmuseum is a typical 19th century 'educational potpourri': it contains mastodon tusks, Roman pottery, fossils, botanical specimens, salon painting – and the Beuys installation." David Galloway, "Beuys and Warhol· Aftershocks" *Art in America* (Volume 76, no. 7, July, 1988) p. 114. "As a classical museum in the tradition of the 19th century, the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt contains works of the visual arts from antiquity to the present as well as scientific collections. In this it is consistent with the origins of the museum as a chamber of art and wonders Thus the visitor is rather surprised when, on the top floor, he is suddenly confronted with the immense block of works by Joseph Beuys, who much appreciated the context of this museum even though he repeatedly criticized the lack of space." Mario Kramer "Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964" Eckhart Gillen (ed) *German Art from Beckmann to Richter Images of a Divided Country* (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlad and Berliner Festspiele GmbH, 1997) pp. 260-264

cardboard packaging and bubble-wrap was left, untidied, from the arrangement of an exhibition of lurid floral canvases on the top floor; strangely representative of the cheerful carelessness I encountered among the staff, who would, one would assume, be otherwise responsible for maintaining a pristine and professional museum environment. In the foyer, scores of schoolchildren sat on the grand marble staircase, awaiting their teacher's instructions for confronting the Natural History collection, while two elderly women alternately sipped tea and talked while sitting on the cheap, plastic and tube-steel chairs of the foyer café. Considering Joseph Beuys's reputation – in both Germany and beyond – as among the most important European artists of the twentieth century, the museum appeared a most unlikely location for the *Block Beuys*, the name given the seven rooms that house the installation, or *Werkkomplex*.[236] On the top floor, directly opposite the garish floral exhibition, is the entrance to the Block.

Beyond the many aesthetic qualities the Block possesses, what is unique about this collection is the metamorphic development that led to its present assemblage. Beginning in 1968 and continuing until his death in 1986, Beuys

> ...[nurtured] this project like a private museum...[making] repeated visits to Darmstadt, carefully recomposing drawings, objects, "relics" from happenings and fragments of earlier installations. Repeatedly he had expressed his wish that the components be seen together and remain together.[237]

For Beuysian scholars and pilgrims alike, the Block, sprawled through seven rooms on the third floor of the museum, is unparalleled. For the most part, it is little more than a serendipitous, if not baffling encounter for visitors meandering amidst the museum's more conventional collections of art and natural history. When walking through these seven rooms the viewer is certainly aware of an aesthetic coherence, yet any sense of narrative structure is undone as they inevitably find themselves returning to sites within the Block. This is due, in part, to the mass of visual 'data' one encounters in each room,

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[236] I adopt certain terms – for example *Werkkomplex* and *Plastik* – on Beuys's behest, as noted by Pamela Kort in her essay "Joseph Beuys: The Profile of a Successor": "Beuys seldom referred to his three-dimensional work as sculpture, preferring instead the term *Plastik*. Given the fact that he claimed to have arrived at art through language, his decision to designate his work as *Plastik* is significant. Whereas *Plastik* derives from Greek *plastikos*, and describes the activity of modelling, *Skulptur* (sculpture) derives from a Latin word (*sculpere*) that indicates the process of reductive carving." op. cit., Ray. pp. 25-26.

[237] op. cit , Galloway pp. 113-122

and the sense one has that the rooms themselves are not stories within a grander narrative, but endlessly interconnected and inter-referencing elements. I cannot help but compare, again, to Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*. As I write these words about the Block, I imagine these descriptors as apt for his monumental work. The particularity of the fragmented placement of objects and symbols; the internally cyclic course of the seven rooms that deny the viewer – as Adorno denied his reader – the temptation to consider the work as linear: all reminiscent of Adorno's paratactical and chiastic formations. To take on either the *Block Beuys* or *Aesthetic Theory* in their entirety would be an ill-fated commitment in a thesis. I would rather recommend, via the bibliography, a number of excellent texts and catalogues dedicated to these tasks. However, in the midst of this clattering of words, I will proffer the apt observations of Eugen Blume (director of the Hamburger Bahnhof Museum in Berlin, itself home to a significant collection of Beuys's work), upon entering the Block:

> The visitor climbs the stairs of the Hessisches Landesmuseum to the second floor and arrives in the first of seven rooms, where it is immediately apparent that silence is required...It is not talking but rather seeing and walking, stopping and standing on or under something and touching that is asked of us. We respond not to a demand from anybody but from the things themselves.[238]

Blume captures the meditative nature of the experience, while simultaneously presenting an autonomous art; a significant distinction for Adorno, via Hegel:

> ...it is necessary to maintain that art has the vocation of revealing *the truth* in the form of sensuous artistic shape, of representing the reconciled antithesis just described, and, therefore, has its purpose in itself, in this representation and revelation. For other objects, such as instruction, purification, improvement, pecuniary gain, endevour after fame and honour, have nothing to do with the work of art as such, and do not determine its conception.[239]

There is certainly a detached other-wordliness to the Block's aesthetic, and a noted sensation of the artist's presence within the rooms:

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[238] Eugen Blume "Conversation on the Beach Too Long" in Manfred Leve *Leve Sieht Beuys· Block Beuys Fotografien* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2004) p 13.

[239] op. cit., Hegel. *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* p 61

> The creator of this organisation, which escapes every known order, seems to be present among the objects with his hands and feelings on and in everything, like a tangible form that wanders hazily through the rooms.[240]

The intimacy with which Beuys managed this collection is evident at many levels. I will reflect on the greater aesthetic of the Block during the course of my analysis, but I would like to illustrate the importance of this collection to others by reflecting on the passions this collection has aroused, and the concerted efforts to keep it as it is. The outrage engendered by "the announcement that numerous elements from...the Darmstadt Block"[241] would be sent to a Berlin museum for a retrospective exhibition was irrefutable:

> Beuys's champions, including his widow, immediately objected, insisting that the thousands of individual elements of the Block, densely and carefully arranged by Beuys himself, should not be moved under any circumstances – even for temporary loan...Encouraged by the artist's widow, Eva Beuys, more than 150 critics, curators, artists and friends rallied to the occasion. Public sentiment (fuelled by nightly reports on the television news) favored maintaining the Darmstadt Block in situ.[242]

Furthermore, an announcement, made in 2007 by the Hessisches Landesmuseum's director, Dr Ina Busch, to use the museum's three-year renovation as "an opportunity for presenting the entire collection in a new light and for generally improving matters"[243] so outraged Beuysian scholars and admirers alike, that Götz Adriani and Dieter Koepplin penned the "Appeal for the Integral Character of Block Beuys in Darmstadt." Scores of critics, academics and gallerists, disturbed by Dr. Busch's wishes "to replace the original grey carpet in the Beuys rooms with smooth industrial flooring or with parquet flooring," and to remove "the wall panels...with their original light beige cloth" became signatories to the appeal, which stated that:

> ...the nature of the Block Beuys installation within this museum is such that the walls, ceilings and floors of the rooms cannot be considered separately from the elements that they house. To

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[240] op. cit., Blume. p. 14

[241] op. cit., Galloway. p. 114.

[242] ibid.

[243] As quoted by Gotz Adriani and Dieter Koepplin in "An Appeal for the Integral Character of Block Beuys in Darmstadt" May, 2007. http://www.initiative-block-beuys.de/20070801eng-appeal-koepplin-adriani.htm. (Accessed 11:18, January 14, 2008) Paragraph 2.

> separate one from the other is not possible, since Joseph Beuys used the given architecture and context. .for positioning his exhibits...The vertical attachment of elements of the work against walls, in unfamiliar relationships, is also part of this contextualising process. The given special relationships and the installed sculptural elements form an integral unit, whilst the transitions from one room to the next are also visually perceived. .The fundamental images of paths and thresholds are intimately connected with Beuys' perception of 'biography' and 'threshold situations'...We encounter images of duration, events, journeys and processes in many ways,' through the whole of the Beuys Block. Beuys incorporated floor forms in several of his works, however, it is only in Darmstadt that they have not become victims of cleaning...What matters is that it corresponds with Beuys concept of art.[244]

Dr Busch has made significant concessions to the appeal, with decisions still pending concerning the jute walls and grey carpets. Having developed my own appreciation of the Block's character and over-arching aesthetic, I too share the signatories' passionate concern for the Block as an indissoluble work. Thus my decision to focus on a single vitrine amidst the seven-room *Werkkomplex* at first appears not only as folly, but also as hypocrisy. Yet simple logistics demand some narrowing of focus – or perhaps a turn to the meditative simplicity espoused by Blume – otherwise we may become hopelessly entangled by the many threads of Beuys's project, as "every point of [his] life was considered under the point of view of sculpture."[245] Explicating Beuys's contribution as an artist working within philosophical discourse determined the decision to adopt a re/defined reading of his work. That the elements of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* are encased in a glass vitrine helps define this work. Moreover, that this vitrine alone, amidst all of the others, is given a title which both details its objective[246] and comes with

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[244] ibid., paragraph 3.

[245] Joseph Beuys in interview with Kim Levin in "Some Neglected Bequests: The Inheritance of Beuys" op. cit., Ray p 177

[246] Important here is the fact that this rare instance of a Beuys work making direct reference to events of World War II was assembled in its final form precisely in 1968, that is to say, parallel to Beuys' tentative public engagement with his own wartime experiences. Beuys underscores the unique importance of this thematically specific vitrine in an interview, also in 1968, in which he addresses the heterogeneous, apparently random nature of the works included in the exhibition then on view in Munich:

"- It's just an exhibition of many objects which I have made. It's not important that they're lying on tables, and it's also not important that they're in vitrines

- And what of how they're lying, how they're arranged?

- How they are lying is almost not important as well. With the exception of one vitrine, which I entitled 'Auschwitz Demonstration", and the one about the concentration camps – those [objects] have a certain relationship

- And it's a matter of indifference whether one combines or halves the contents?

a periodic reference to the time in Beuys's life when his trauma became manifest as depression, points to its uniqueness in the context of the Block. Further questioning of this decision is countered by reference to both Mario Kramer's reading of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* titled "Art Nourishes Life,"[247] Gene Rays's essay "Joseph Beuys and the After-Auschwitz Sublime"[248] and Matthew Biro's "Representation and Event: Anselm Kiefer, Joseph Beuys and the Memory of the Holocaust"[249] In these texts, Kramer (currently senior curator at Frankfurt's Museum for Contemporary Art), Ray (currently curator at the Ringling Museum of Art, State Art Museum of Florida) and Biro (currently Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at the University of Michigan) each theoretically and historically 'disassemble' *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* for the reader, analysing its components by way of accessing collective interpretation. Yet none of these authors have presented Beuys's project as a philosophical inquiry unto itself. With their focus on the representation rather than the impulse behind the work, and its relationship to Beuys's life, these texts (though critical for advising this one) fail to treat Beuys as anything more than an artist. Irrespective of how focussed one's attention to Beuys's work becomes, there must remain an underlying consideration of the collection as a whole, with traces between specific pieces binding the thousands of components not only to each other, but to happenings and *Aktionen* from other times and sites. Each of these must then be considered in relation to his life and his thoughts and, finally, I propose, to the philosophical considerations of his contemporaries. Donald Kuspit confirms the importance of this approach when recalling a particular meeting with Beuys:

> On my last visit to Beuys, not too long before his death, he took me to task for photographing his works in the Darmstadt Museum. He assumed I meant to treat them as autonomous objects of art, severing their connection to life – to his life – which I denied. This was always the threat to

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- These things can be combined, halved or interchanged Of course there are always interesting connections which emerge when one arranges them first this way, then that.

The 'Auschwitz-Demonstration' piece is the only one iconographically fixed with a title, and is here emphatically distinguished from the other works. It is exempted from Beuys' refreshingly insouciant attitude towards the evocative possibilities of random rearrangement of his objects." Peter Nisbet "Beuys: the profile of a successor" op cit., Ray. p 13

[247] op. cit., Gillen. p. 261.

[248] op. cit., Ray. p. 55-74

[249] Matthew Biro. "Representation and Event· Anselm Kiefer, Joseph Beuys, and the Memory of the Holocaust" *The Yale Journal of Criticism* (Volume 16, no. 1, 2003) pp. 113-46

him; the deadening of art in art – in a closed stylistic system – rather than the recognition of it as opening to, and within, life.[250]

So, as we turn to *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, this thesis presents a seemingly paradoxical challenge; to keep in mind the multiple factors presented thus far – of the Beuysian *leben/werkkomplex* and Adornian aesthetics – while maintaining a consideration of the anti-autonomous in Beuys's work. Within this structure, any simple, self-referential autonomy is impossible, as Kuspit explains:

Art as art was superficial for Beuys; it meant making objects that were limited, hermetic – that did not radiate out. To make art that did not simply have a place in life, but that seemed full of life, was to be visionary. It meant to work for change. Beuys wanted his art to catalyze social change, much as it reflected personal change. From self-transformation to social transformation; this was his path of art.[251]

Thus *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* is proffered as a piece of the greater Beuysian puzzle, subjected to analysis as representative of that great artery of Beuys's work which deals with his, and Germany's trauma.

To distance myself from Kramer, Ray and Biro's art historical approach to embark on a new, philosophical study of the work, I will enter the next, and perhaps most methodologically significant section, with an explication of my approach to reading *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964.*

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[250] Donald B Kuspit. "Authoritarian Abstraction" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Volume 36, no. 1, 1977) p. 55

[251] ibid.

4.2 The work: *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*

(Fig. 6) Joseph Beuys. *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* Mixed Media.
Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt.

I will examine *Auschwitz Demonstration, 1956-1964* by first breaking it down into 'elements' or 'components', which I will consider individually. As I have noted, this task is

simplified by the 'construction' of the vitrine which is essentially an assemblage of these components to create a united whole. This fragmentary construction echoes similar aesthetic practice in other forms of creativity, and evident in Adorno:

> Fragmentary writing is premised upon the refusal of the operations that establish 'rational' connections between statements in theoretical discourse (inference, entailment, deduction) and their linguistic representatives ('therefore', 'because', etc.). For Adorno, these operations are the markers for domination in the conceptual realm. Equally fragmentary writing does not pretend to empirical accuracy (truth as correspondence). Fragmentary writing is modernist, its logical and syntactical dislocations the cognitive equivalent of dissonance in music.[252]

Beuys goes even further when, with a sense of tragic irony, he gives the elements ambiguous titles and dates, thus creating an illusory documentation, and drawing the viewer into the idea of the vitrine and its contents as 'at home' in the confines of the Hessisches Landesmuseum. This deployment of irony and ambiguity as fragmentary and dislocative tools are borne of the concerns both Beuys and Adorno have with the methodology surrounding 'empirical accuracy.' To continue with this reading of *Auschwitz Demonstration, 1956-1964*, these components (and all their sundry considerations) will be located against the backdrop of Beuys's and Adorno's traumatic contemplation, before finally emerging as an interpretation of the whole vitrine as *a single work.*

The order in which I analyse the elements of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* is taken from the Hessisches Landesmuseum's own documentation of the Block Beuys.[253] Each passage dedicated to a singular 'component' will be headed with the work's name (in italics) and 'date.'

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[252] J M. Bernstein "Introduction" Theodor Adorno *The Culture Industry* (London: Routledge, 2001) p. 8.

[253] Documentation of layout of Block Beuys, available at the Hessisches Landesmuseum, attributed to Jürgen Hausser, Hessisches Landesmuseum Arbeitskreis, 1995.

4.2.1 *Fisch* 1956

Examination of Benjamin Buchloh's methodology in *Beuys: Twilight of the Idol* exposes the fear surrounding any prospect of resurrecting the German *Weltanschaung.*[254] This suspicion of distinctively Germanic cultural expression recalls the political and historical burden borne by the works of Nietzsche and Wagner after the demise of the Third Reich. Certainly Beuys's re-alignment with the drive for a spiritually founded, aesthetic rebuilding of German culture throughout the 1950s places him within the scope of Buchloh's critical aim, particularly when it appeared, on first inspection, heavily imbued with the symbolism and impulse of the Germanic and Nordic mythology that forged the *Blut und Boden*[255] relationship central to Nazi ideology. As examined already, the 1950s was also a period during which Beuys created a body of work – including *Fisch* – laden with Christian symbolism. When, in 1996, Jesuit scholar Friedhelm Mennekes compiled the articles and interviews for *Joseph Beuys: Christus DENKEN/THINKING Christ*, the most conspicuous aspect of Beuys's understanding Christianity was its consistency with the pantheist tradition of German idealism propounded by, among others, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and Schleiermacher. However, his understanding – particularly and deeply indebted to German romanticism – was not the politically regressive sense alluded to by Buchloh:

> If you adhere to pantheistic ideas, like, for example, they way they are expressed in the German Romantic, then according to, for instance, Novalis or Hölderlin this core of evolution...can be seen only in connection with the figure of the essence of Christ. The pantheists who should be taken seriously also recognize that...this essence of Christ was already in existence before Christ.[256]

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[254] "After its rise to power, Fascism developed a 'cultural' façade. .a *Weltanschaung*, a religious faith and an approach to art, which stressed the *spiritual* above material factors." Bernard Smith *Place, Taste and Tradition* (Melbourne, New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) p 276.

[255] "The National Socialist ideas on art were based on abstract theories whose catchwords were 'soul,' 'genius,' 'tragedy,' 'race.' They considered 'race and homeland' or *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) the basis of a Germanic art that would express the true spiritual values of the Aryan race, purified of all Bolshevist and Semitic influences." Mary-Margaret Goggin "'Decent' vs. 'Degenerate' Art: The National Socialist Case" *Art Journal* (Volume 50, no. 4, Winter, 1991) p. 86.

[256] Joseph Beuys in interview with Elisabeth Pfister Pfister was editor at the *Hessischer Rundfunk* Pfister reported on the opening of an exhibition of Beuys's religious work titled *Menschenbild-Christusbild* which opened in the Church of St Markus in Nied, Frankfurt (Main), November 10, 1984 This interview took place a short time after the opening op. cit , Mennekes p. 82.

In this interview between Beuys and Elisabeth Pfister Beuys's central concern regarding his Christian expression is revealed. During the interview, Beuys begins to express this concern, directed at both institutionalised Christian theology, and the expression of Christ as a historical figure. Pfister recalls a speech Mennekes made at the opening of a Beuys exhibition, in which he located Beuys's works "within the tradition of Christian thought."[257] Pfister asks if, in light of Beuys's revelations concerning Christian thought, Beuys minded Mennekes' interpretation. Beuys answers:

> No, no that does not bother me at all. I only hope that it is so. The idea of the individual is inseperably fused with that of Christ...This does not, however, mean that the individual has to admit to what has developed historically out of the institutional work of the church. And in that respect, I am a great opponent of all churches, of denominational Christendom.[258]

To read Beuys's work from this period one must, therefore, understand Beuys's opposition to denominational and institutional religion, and consider the pantheism of Beuys's aesthetic and the resulting allegorical import Beuys places on Christian symbols. What I find particularly interesting when considering Beuys's decision to place *Fisch* in the vitrine, is how this representation of German spirituality precedes Beuys's representation and approach to German politics. In the 1960s, Beuys's political adherence would be troubled by a parallel disregard for denominational and institutional politics. This disregard permeated post-war German politics, as the institutions of both church and state lay in rubble, burdened by their roles in the war. Indeed, during the first weeks of post-war occupied Germany, the returning political exile (and eventual Chancellor of West Germany between 1969 and 1974) Willi Brandt wrote to supporters: "At present Germany lies like a political vacuum...the German state has ceased to exist."[259] The churches were in no less parlous a state. Germany's major Christian denominations – Catholicism and Lutheranism – paradoxically weathered questions of complicity or re-emerged from outright abolishment.[260] For while Hitler secretly admired (although this was increasingly reserved for the church's structural and institutional

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[257] ibid., p. 80.

[258] ibid.

[259] Willi Brandt. Letters written from Stockholm (August 14 and August 26, 1945) *Willi Brandt: In Exile.* (London: Oswald Wolff Limited, 1971) p 48

[260] This paradox is explicated in W.R. Ward, "Review: Guilt and Innocence: The German Churches in the Twentieth Century" *The Journal of Modern History* (Volume 68, no. 2, 1996) pp 398-426

powers, not its tenets), and to some degree tolerated Roman Catholicism and installed a Nazi, Ludwig Müller, as the Lutheran bishop in Berlin, all denominations had opponents to Nazism. Sadly, for the resistance, many were exiled, or, in many instances, became casualties of the regime. In an antithetical position to Hitler, Beuys's post-war disavowal of the institutional/historical presence of the church opposed his affection for the core tenets of Christianity and his interest in allegory and symbolism. The difficult relationship between church and state during the Nazi regime affected an equally difficult one after its demise. Beuys's ambiguous representations of post-war German spirituality are also a measure of the greater political and social trauma. There is a sense, however, that subversion of the symbol was central to his creative impulse.

The Christian symbolism of the fish is one of the most widely recognized religious motifs, but from the hands of Joseph Beuys, taking refuge on a friend's farm to manage his post-war traumatic depression, came a dark and unrecognizable form. *Fisch* (*Fish*) is a bronze cast of a wood relief (with the approximate dimensions of 35x15 centimetres) placed in the right anterior of the vitrine. *Fisch* is the earliest work in the vitrine, and was produced at the height of Beuys's traumatic depression, during which time he produced a number of works of *Christ*-ian[261] theme and aesthetic. One might reflect on the meaning of this piece, alone, in this light; however in the consideration of *Fisch* as an element within *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* (thus finding new context and meaning) our evaluation must be more critical.

It is, immediately, the most spatially underwhelming object in the vitrine.[262] Laid flat, the profile of the relief is barely visible for both its finesse, and the aged darkening of the bronze. Closer inspection, will, however, reveal the discernable form of a fish, and what Kramer describes as "an oval egg shape and a rod that could also be interpreted as a harpoon."[263] Later in the text, Kramer offers what he considers a "far-fetched interpretation"[264] of the harpoon in the fish corresponding "to the lancet wound Longinus made in Christ's side."[265] In the context of the greater vitrinal installation, this

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[261] op. cit., Wear. p. 24

[262] It is for these reasons that I have not included a photograph of the work, as these qualities are near impossible to represent or discern with the reproduction technology available

[263] op. cit., Kramer. p. 264.

[264] ibid , p 268

[265] ibid

is not entirely far-fetched. Consider Beuys's trauma and contemplation of the Holocaust when reading this passage concerning Longinus in John 19:34-35:

> But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. The following is a part of what the Holy Spirit told us in that session: "Who pierced My side? Longinus. Longinus pierced My side. Blood and water poured out. My body was drained of blood and water. Why did Longinus pierce My side? So that I would die sooner. And why did I accept to be pierced? So that I can wash you with My blood and water. Did I retaliate to him with a sulk? Did I retaliate to him with a grudge or ill feeling? Did I retaliate to him with hatred? What I retaliated to him was love because I gave him healing. I made his one eye that could see to be two. And he had salvation without end because what I retaliated to him was love. What I gave to him was affection.[266]

Careful examination of similar works of the time, combined with the extensive and detailed work done by Friedhelm Mennekes on Beuys's "Christ-view and Christ-picture"[267] (which Mennekes claims is largely drawn from "the classical *trias* of suffering, death and resurrection"[268]), points to an aesthetic, political and spiritual concern with the cyclical notion of life, as represented in *Fisch* by the harpoon (suffering, or death imminent) and the egg (birth, or resurrection imminent).[269] Together with the Christian association of Christ with healing, and in the interaction with Longinus, forgiving and conversion, Beuys shapes this reading into a contemporary representation of the post-Holocaust German condition. On its own, *Fisch* is little more than a remnant of this period of Beuys's inspired creativity, but in the context of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* it has specific aesthetic and meaning. The dark and almost morbid dreariness of its form and presence functions as the aesthetic antithesis of both the luminous glory of ecclesiastical Catholicism and the stark-white asceticism of Lutheran churches. For all its multiple meaning, the awkward representation of the fish is overwhelmed by the decayed aesthetic. Indeed the cast appears more as a relic of resurrection, fossilized within its glass case alongside images of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, forever a representation of suffering and death, made by Beuys's own hand.

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[266] John 19: 34-35 The Holy Bible New International Version. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) p. 965.

[267] op. cit., Mennekes. p. 6.

[268] ibid

[269] op. cit., Mennekes. p 6

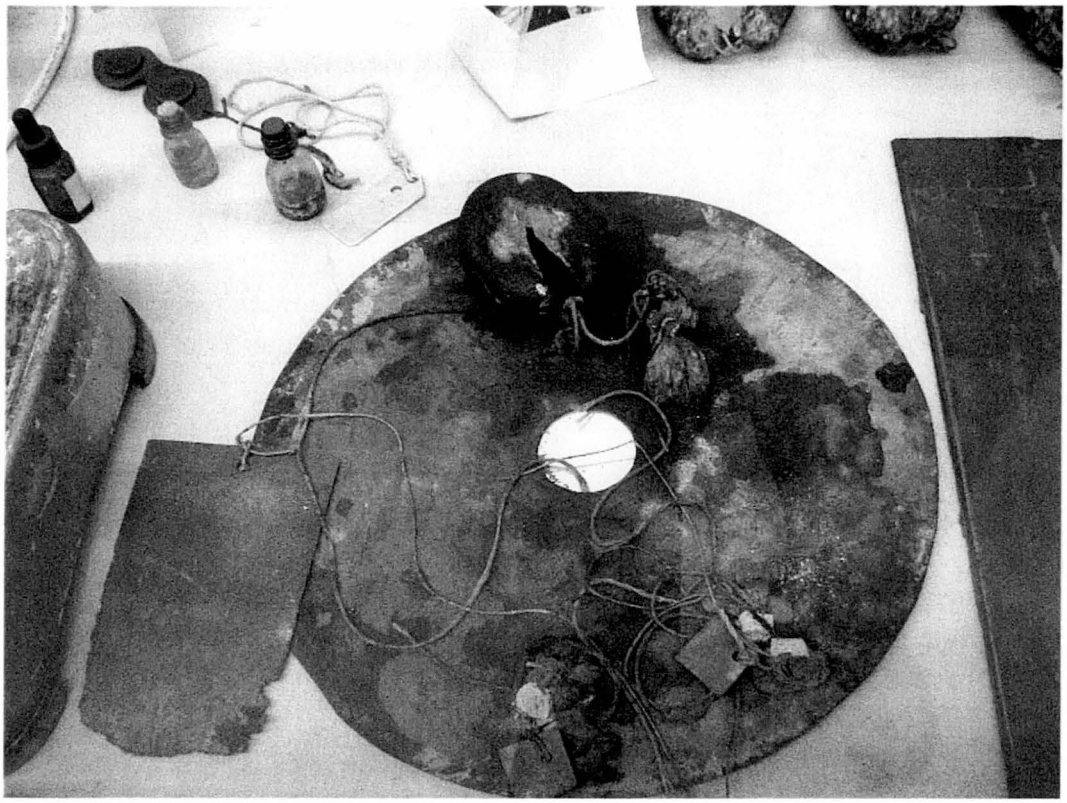
Though not what Adorno would have had in mind when writing this passage, it nonetheless makes for an interesting alternative reading of *Fisch* to consider Adorno's historical binding of archaism with the aesthetic:

> What appears ugly is in the first place what is historically older, what art rejected on its path toward autonomy, and what is therefore mediated in itself. The concept of the ugly may well have originated in the seperation of art from its archaic phase: It marks the permanent return of the archaic, intertwined with the dialectic of enlightenment in which art participates.[270]

Here we might recall the reading of Beuys's deliberately archaic aesthetic within Christian motif, in the form of Adorno's imperative; as an historical relic freed of any demands of beauty, now representing the ugliness and futility of myth in the face of Germany's daunting spiritual rehabilitation.

[270] op cit., Adorno *Aesthetic Theory* p. 62.

4.2.2 *Akku (Wurst)* 1963



(Fig. 7) Joseph Beuys. *Akku (Wurst)* (detail of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*) Mixed Media.

Lacking the direct iconographic or symbolic features found in the other elements of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, *Akku (Wurst)* is, in many respects, the most challenging element to interpret. Upon a filthy, grease-stained metal disc lay a few scattered end pieces of blood-sausage, all now infected with mould. All are labeled and interconnected by a grimy length of string. A single, larger label sits off to the left of the disc. The immediate effect this labeled detritus conveys is of irony; for while the labeling suggests the presence of either purchasable objects, or objects for which someone might require information, clearly neither scenario is reasonable. Furthermore, the labels contain no data – pricing or information. This ironic internal dialectic – "Here are some items (undesirable, unknowable), and this is what they cost/are (undesirable, unknowable)" – is, like Adorno's chiastic style, a key method Beuys uses to generate questions about representation.

Offsetting the grimness of this arrangement is a mirror in the centerpiece, which reflects the light from above. This contrast between the luminous centre and the sullied outer projects an aesthetic dichotomy, thrusting the viewer again into the questioning

process. Of course the work becomes less ambivalent in the context of the whole vitrine (and, for that matter, the whole Block) due mainly to the recurring presence of decomposed/decomposing food matter. The now-familiar and vivid imagery of the skeletal physiques of concentration camp prisoners, weakened by starvation, emphasise the cruel irony of this poisonous, unpalatable offering.

The part title of the piece – *Akku* – is a reference to storage, or accumulation (*Akkumulator* "describes an instrument for storing energy" or *Akkumulieren*, which means "to pile up, collect, and store"[271]), and projects the antithetical conditions to those of Auschwitz, where even the barest necessities for life are denied. The combined effect further emphasises the significance of innovative, conceptual artistic projects that deal with trauma, particularly when it is felt that the familiar images (particularly photographs) of trauma are losing potency:

> The photograph...presents a number of dangers to its viewers. The first is the power to desensitize: by looking at such images, we become accustomed to them. Photography generally distances its spectators from the event; through repeated viewings, this separation is increased. In addition, documentary representations of the Holocaust have the potential to exploit their human subjects. The terrified women and children depicted in the photograph did not consent to have their picture taken. At that moment ..they were defenseless – a fact that their thinness, the "unguarded" nature of their body language, and their frightened expressions show very well. By representing their powerlessness, the photograph can thus be seen to victimize them for a second time, repeating (albeit in a less violent form) the violation of the Jews' autonomy initially perpetrated by the Germans. Furthermore, although the photograph can produce creative and responsible forms of spectatorial identification, ones that are split between an awareness of self and an awareness of the victimized other, it can – through its realism – also produce a feeling in the spectator that he or she has understood the past. In this way, the photograph can promote a sense that this traumatic moment of human history has been "mastered" and that it no longer needs to be confronted.[272]

Certainly the circumstances of my encounter with the Block facilitated a lasting effect. Fortunate to have the time to work my way back, forth and through the collection, I could make a considered reading of the works. Whether the rooms were sparsely occupied (Room 1, see Fig. 4) or densely occupied (Room 2, see Fig. 5) by objects, the grey-carpeted floors and the walls, covered by hessian of a red-brown earthen hue, stifled

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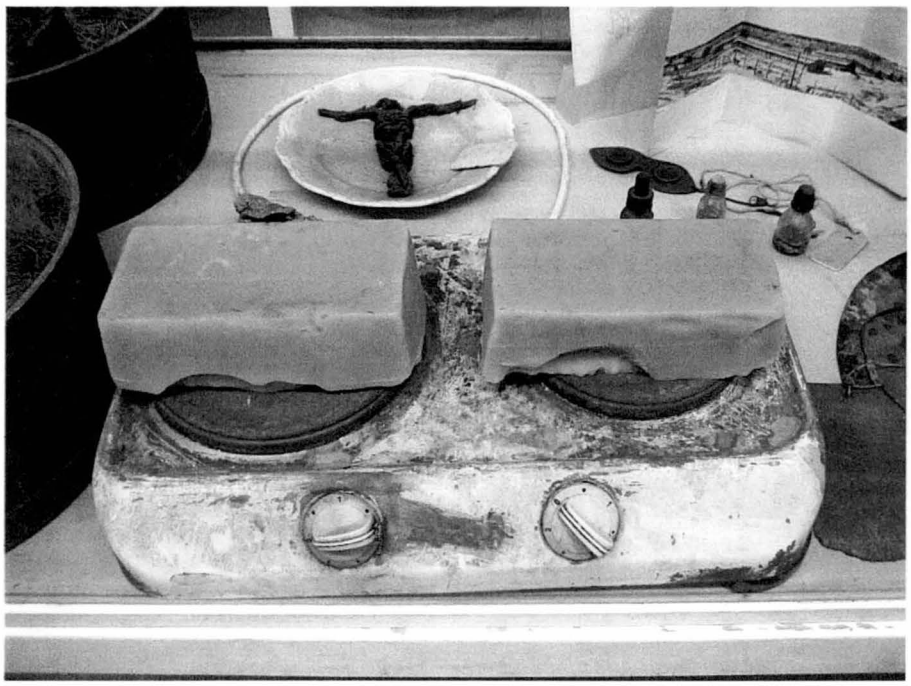
[271] op. cit., Kramer. p 264.

[272] op. cit , Biro. "Representation and Event: Anselm Kiefer, Joseph Beuys, and the Memroy of the Holocaust" pp. 116-117

sound. From the narrow corridor where I stood viewing *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, I came to dwell upon *Akku* as a representation of a place of tragic transaction.

4.2.3 *Wärmeplastik* 1964



(Fig. 8) Joseph Beuys. *Wärmeplastik* (detail of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*) Mixed Media.

With its central location, and immediately recognisable form, *Wärmeplastik* is perhaps the most visually significant item in the vitrine. Moreover, it is heavily imbued with referential connections with Beuys's life and work. The positional and aesthetic dominance of *Wärmeplastik* in the vitrine forges a powerful vision of Germany's trauma and the intrinsic relationship to Beuys's life and work. The materials project the grotesqueness Adorno found in Rimbaud and Benn and the disfunctionality of the German state. In purely descriptive terms, *Wärmeplastik* consists of two tallow blocks atop a battered portable electric stove. Beuys's regular use of tallow/wax/fat[273] is well documented, and evident amidst virtually any collection of his works. In almost every room of Block Beuys there are arranged clumps, smearings, arrangements, or residual traces of it. That Beuys's intention is always one of ideals of healing, the grotesque physicality and connotation surrounding the material is undeniable. Here, Beuys reflects on the significance of the material for its deliberative powers:

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[273] The three terms are used interchangeably to describe the material, extracted from animal fat, that Beuys used in his work.

> My initial intention in using fat was to stimulate discussion. The flexibility of the material appealed to me particularly in its reactions to temperature changes. This flexibility is psychologically effective – people instinctively feel it relates to inner processes and feelings. The discussion I wanted was about the potential of sculpture and culture, what they mean, what language is about, what human production and creativity are about.[274]

This text is related to *Stuhl mit Fett* (*Chair with Fat*), which is in Room 3 of the Block, but nonetheless explains the overall importance of the material for Beuys. Numerous attempts have been made to link Beuys's encounter with the Tatars with his use of fat, but Beuys continuously denied such a direct link, instead claiming that the Tatars simply alerted him to its potential as a *Plastik* medium.

In *Wärmeplastik* I believe we are witness to Beuys's most extreme presentation of this dynamic. By placing the tallow/wax/fat atop a device whose sole purpose is heating, Beuys creates an unnerving situation, considering the consequence of any imminent or potential activation of the stove. In the context of the broader assemblage of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, *Wärmeplastik* is predictably and commonly interpreted as reference to the burnt bodies of the victims, and the horrific concept of residue from this process. It hints at notions such as the reported rendering of victims' remains for the production of soap, however debate has failed to prove or disprove this practice.[275] I would be cautious about such a reading, if not only for the fact that Beuys is rarely this simplistic in his representation. The sentiment might be accurate, but a more detailed analysis can extract alternate meaning. One aspect of *Wärmeplastik* which challenges this simplistic reading is Beuys's own explanation for the use of tallow/wax/fat, and the tenuous imminence of its dissolution. If this material is meant, as Beuys insisted, to fuel the discourse concerning "what human productivity and creativity are about" then consider the dichotomous position of the victims and perpetrators of the Final Solution in this light. Not only is the malevolent productivity and creativity (and the relationship this has to the mutation of modernity) of the Nazis represented here, but in the loosely geometric forms of the bleached tallow resides the representation of the complete reduction of productivity and creativity of the victims: even if they survive, this had been leeched from them and displaced. To extend this interpretation, one must look at the

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[274] op cit., Kuoni. p 125.

[275] One report describes "four bars of 'Jewish soap' manufactured from corpses in the extermination camps and which, discovered in Germany, were wrapped in a shroud, in 1948, and piously buried according to the rites in a corner of Haifa cemetery in Israel" *Paris Match* (no 395, 3 November, 1956) p 93.

electric lead to the stove – the part through which the power to melt the blocks is channeled – and note its impotence. The plug has been removed, and the end of filthy cable is coarsely wrapped in aluminium foil. "The factor of things being put out of action" says Kramer, "seems to me to be of prime importance in all objects exhibited here."[276] Beuys used the stove in one of his most (in)famous *Aktionen* performed as a part of the Fluxus[277] 'Festival of New Art' held in Aachen, July 20, 1964 – the twentieth anniversary of the attempt to assassinate Hitler. The highly political reference set the tone for the evenings precedings, attracting not only a collective of leftist students, intellectuals and artists, but a core group of right-wing demonstrators. Beuys's *Aktion*, titled *Kukei/Akopee-nein/Brown cross/Fat corners/Model Fat corners* was explained, retrospectively to Caroline Tisdall:

> After making a quiet sculpture with ultra-violet beams I filled a grand piano with geometric shapes, sweets, dried oak leaves, marjoram, a postcard of Aachen cathedral and soap powder. Very loosely, so that it was still playable, but the tone was altered by the filling...Then I heated up a stove and melted the blocks of fat, warming it in this Fat Chest – that was the Kukei![278]

Beuys makes no further reference to what 'the Kukei' is, but the Japanese word for 'rectangle' is one possibility. Outside the confines of aesthetic analysis this *Aktion* is perhaps best known for its unexpected conclusion. The group of right-wing demonstrators (mainly students) stormed the stage, presumably outraged at the apparently degraded condition of art in the aftermath of the monumentalism of the traditional nationalist German aesthetic, and punched Beuys hard enough to give him a bloodied nose. In perhaps his most opportunistic moment of self-mythologisation, Beuys grabbed a nearby crucifix and raised his hands in a baptismal pose. Cameras flashed and the image (Fig. 9) remains the ultimate stance of the revolutionary cultural evangelist. Of the performance, Beuys said, "It had to do with the relationship of heat, cold, energy, and the related process of transformation."[279] When researching Beuys's work of this

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[276] op. cit., Kramer. p 264.

[277] Fluxus is an international art movement/collective established in the late-1950s/early-1960s by George Maciunas While built on the principles of Dadaism, Maciunas drew inspiration from a range of political and artistic sources and theories; among them were aspects of neo-Marxism, indeterminacy, minimalism and experimentalism. Beuys had a rather brief and somewhat troubled association with the movement. Further reading on Beuys, and the movement as a whole· Ken Friedman (ed.) *The Fluxus Reader* (Chicester, West Sussex and New York. Academy Editions, 1998)

[278] op. cit., Tisdall and Beuys. p. 90.

[279] op. cit., Kramer. p 256.

period (I now refer specifically to the dates used in the title of the vitrine: 1956-1964) I was reminded of Longinus, and sense the over-arching morality of Beuys's work during this period as one of transformation and betterment. Beuys's concern with transformation appears, fundamentally, to be Germany's (and his own) from Nazism to democracy.

(Fig. 9) Joseph Beuys. *Kukei/Akopee-nein/Brown cross/Fat corners/Model Fat corners.* Performance still, Aachen, July 20, 1964.

The Fat Chest Beuys describes is in fact in the vitrine next to *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964.* This interconnection between time and location in effect disrupts any sense of linearity in the narrative structure of the Block Beuys. This renders the entire project like the mind itself; that is, many compartments serving different functions but all interconnected and unable to work without one piece in place. As we will come to see, this will occur during the course of the analysis of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* over and over again.

In reminding the reader of the embedded interrelations between Beuys's life and work, I would like to re-introduce the document – outside the actual artwork; outside its critical reception and interpretation – in which Beuys's life and work are fused: the autobiographical narrative *Lebenslauf/Werkslauf.* Possession of this final representational/ interpretive key benefits any investigation into Joseph Beuys's work and the discourse of political trauma in Germany; for within *Lebenslauf/Werkslauf* is the completion of the methodological puzzle.

The *Lebenslauf/Werkslauf* narrative has become the biographical *de rigueur* among Beuysian scholars, however I intend to incorporate it less as an appendix to the text, and

more as a backdrop to the further analysis of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964.* Beyond the events noted in the brief biography in the introduction chapter, Beuys's life is popularly presented as somewhat mysterious. He was, without doubt, one of the twentieth century's most vibrant self-promoters, however beyond the art and persona(e), little is known – which is another reason I am drawn to *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964.* It is the only work in Beuys's 'course,' which confronts, both in title and content, the ultimate, incomprehensible act of Germany's war effort. It is hardly surprising that the ambiguity of Beuys's own words divided his reception between that of the hero and villain.

Lebenslauf/Werkslauf has, in varied form, been the biographical accompaniment to many of Beuys's *Aktionen,* happenings and exhibitions since 1964, and has been reprinted in most major (and countless minor) texts explicating Beuys's life and work. It has been described varyingly (as "a playful and personal sequence of events transformed mostly into 'exhibitions' as a parody of the traditional artist's biography;"[280] a merging of "art and life into one hagiographic process"[281] and a "laying down [of] the foundations of Beuys's most important 'series,' the events of his life as an artist."[282]). As illustrated earlier (recall, in particular, the opening entry: "1921 – Kleve Exhibition of a wound drawn together with plaster") Beuys's regard for self-mythologising ambiguity over historical accuracy is clear. Beuys's birthplace (the site of this first 'exhibition') was not Kleve, but nearby Krefeld. In an interview with artist and publisher Willoughby Sharp, Beuys confirms this, and explains how it came to be:

> SHARP: Most of your catalog biographies state that you were born in Kleve, but you were actually born in Krefeld, weren't you?
> BEUYS: Yes, I was born in a hospital in Krefeld, but that was purely accidental. My mother was making a short visit to Krefeld and I was born in the middle of it. But at most I spent three days there. I have no relationship to Krefeld, or more precisely to the landscape, but I do have a relationship to Kleve. That is where my parents lived and where I grew up.[283]

Then, in Heiner Stachelhaus's 1987 biography, a variation on the story appears:

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[280] op. cit., Nisbet. p. 15

[281] op. cit., Tisdall p.10.

[282] op. cit., Temkin and Rose. p. 11.

[283] Willoughby Sharp. Interview with Joseph Beuys (1969) op. cit , Kuoni. p 77

> The reason that Beuys first saw the light of day in Krefeld is simple: the family doctor did not want Beuys's mother...to give birth at home because he feared complications. So he sent her to have her baby at the obstetric clinic in Krefeld.[284]

Further deviation from Beuys's recollections appears in the detailed "Chronology and Selected Exhibition History" that concludes the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *Joseph Beuys: Actions, Vitrines, Environments.* Though Beuys's birth in Krefeld is noted here – correctly – as May 12, 1921, it indicates that Beuys did not move to Kleve until September, 1921, some four months after his birth. Where did Beuys and his family go during this period? Of course, in the context of this research, it is not important, and I have no intention to embark on biographical nitpicking as I have already made clear my reservations (in concurrence with Adorno) concerning the adequacies of conventional historical representation (within which the genre of conventional biographical representation subsists). My intention is more to demonstrate how these details and minutiae cloud research such as this a great deal more than they assist it. Surely, though, the peculiar reference to his birth as an 'Exhibition of a wound drawn together with plaster' is, in its own opacity, as (if not more) academically unsound in terms of methodological standing? On the contrary; I believe it to more helpful than the attempts at factually representing Beuys's birth *for* – not *despite* – its ambiguity and multitudinous meaning. I concede that it further establishes my interpretation of Beuys's work as outside the methodological traditions, however the very term suggests a positivism that is at odds with the conception of Beuys's and Adorno's work.

This intriguing and inter-related amalgam of work, from *Wärmeplastik* to the Aachen performance to the *Lebenslauf/Werkslauf*, demonstrate the complexity of Beuys's work, yes; but moreso it illustrates the tangled complexity of Germany's trauma. Irrespective of one's opinion concerning Beuys's aesthetic, few would deny the importance of this representation. *Wärmeplastik* is undoubtedly the most dramatic realization of this representational power, but it is only in the context of the surrounding works that it represents Beuys's journey through this trauma.

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[284] op. cit., Stachelhaus. p. 90.

4.2.4. *1.Ratte* 1957

(Fig. 10) Joseph Beuys. *1. Ratte* (detail of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*) Mixed Media.

This work is fraught with a disturbing sense of tragedy. One of two wooden sieves filled with dead, dry grass, *1. Ratte* contains the desiccated and long-dead carcass of a rat, curled in death. The have been multiple interpretations of *1. Ratte*, which Mario Kramer believes ought be read as meaning either *First Rat* or *First of All: Rat.* First, Robert

Hughes' viewed the rat as "a parody of Christ in the manger,"[285] while Klaus Pohl considers it, more simply, as a reference to the habit, particularly among German anti-semites of referring to Jews as 'rats.' I would go further, perhaps, and consider the two interpretations as one: the Jewish Christ. Certainly, the disturbingly mummified body acts as both a reminder of Beuys's commitment to the transubstantive notion of Christ, while drawing some tragic irony from the relationship between Christendom and Judaism. Moreover, if its construction date (1957) is accurate, then this piece forms the aesthetic antithesis to the construction of German identity of the time. While furious economic and material reconstruction of Germany was being undertaken at the cost of remembrance, Beuys creates here a disturbingly lifeless reminder of the past that cannot (here, in its vitrinal state) be removed. And with the infant body of Christ replaced by the corpse of a diseased rodent, Beuys delivers a scathing attack on both the questionable position of the Church in the Holocaust, and the essence of Christianity that seemed absent throughout this appalling period. In this sense it is, in its left anterior position, the other, appalling bookend to *Fisch*. For whereas *Fisch* possesses aesthetic qualities that align it with Christian tradition, albeit archaic, *1. Ratte* is a contemporary ruin with aesthetic qualities more attributable to desolatory abandon. These qualities may well be interpreted, with some finality, as ironic, however I was intrigued by this passage from *Aesthetic Theory*:

> If the idea of artworks is eternal life, they can attain this only by annihilating everything living within their domain: this too inheres in their expression. It is the expression of the demise of the whole, just as the whole speaks of the demise of expression. In the impulse of every particular element of an artwork toward integration, the disintegrative impulse of nature secretly manifests itself. The more integrated artworks are, the more what constitutes them disintegrates in them. To this extent their success is their decomposition and that lends them their fathomlessness. Decomposition at the same time releases the immanent counterforce of art, its centrifugal force.[286]

Without doubt, there are oppositional forces in Beuys's blunt symbolism against the underlying abstraction of Adorno's text, and this remains the distinction between the two representative forms. Yet, it is easy for me to imagine Adorno, scribbling these notes while viewing Beuys's work, or, alternately, Beuys constructing his vitrines in *homage* to Adorno's words. I believe it can be safely assumed – based on Adorno's limited

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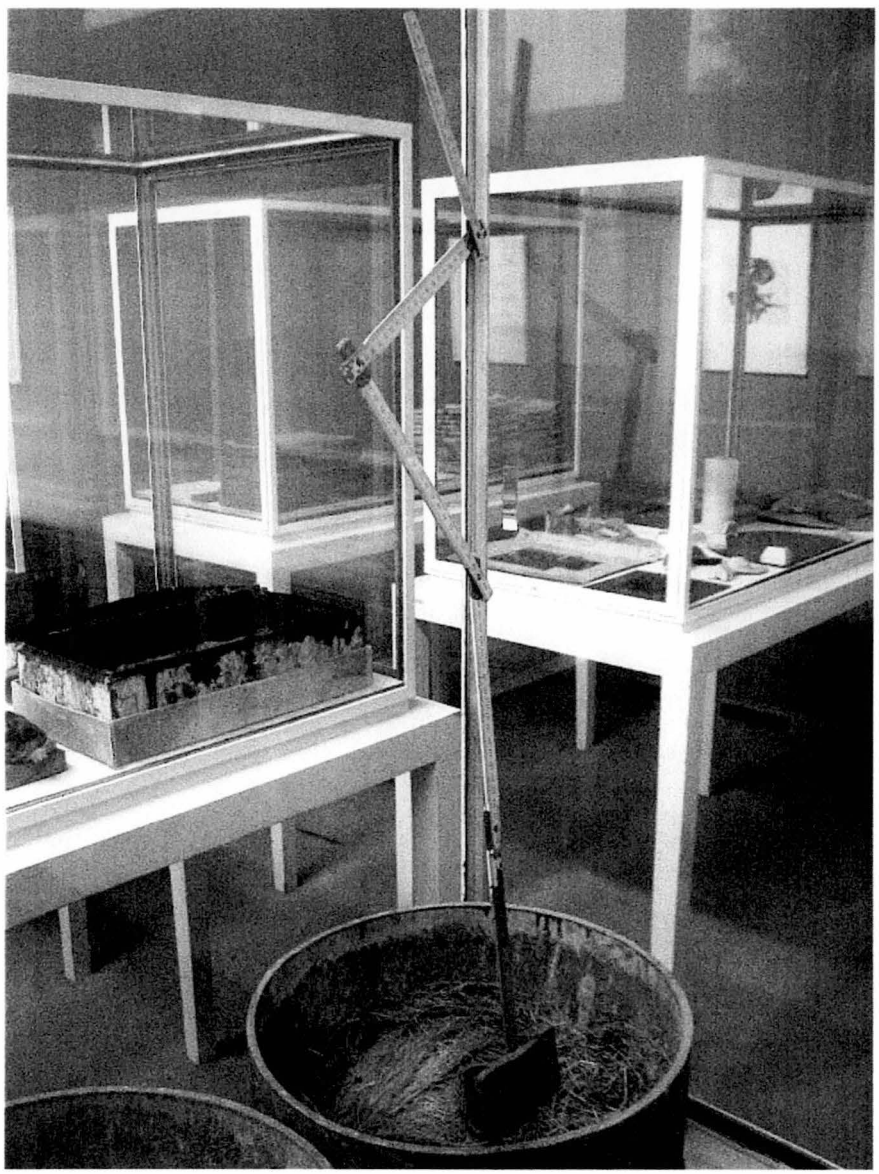
[285] Robert Hughes *The Shock of the New : Art and the Century of Change* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991) p. 403

[286] op. cit., Adorno *Aesthetic Theory* p. 68.

knowledge and distaste for conceptual art – that Adorno speaks of *meta*physical, not physical decomposition. Nevertheless, Beuys's display, here and throughout the Block, is an embodiment of this thought that allows us to have a sensory (read: *aesthetic*) experience of Adorno's thought. Though specific to this single passage of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* and this element of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, this again demonstrates the combined effect of reading a philosophical text and viewing a work of visual art as contributing to a greater understanding of a matter of critical importance. I might add that the sensory appeal contributes the additional feeling of satisfaction, an important element of engagement.[287]

[287] One might consider the essence of these musings an indication of the critic/interpretor as mediator between art and philosophy. For more on this interpretation of the respective roles explicated, I defer to pp. 12-13.

4.2.5. *Blitz* 1964



(Fig. 11) Joseph Beuys. *Blitz* (detail of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*) Mixed Media.

According to the date, *Blitz* was constructed seven years after *1. Ratte*. However it is of similar form and emphasises the determination and constancy of Beuys's thematic. This is in itself a challenge to the central idea of modernity – that of constant and measured betterment – which was effectively halted by the Holocaust. Whether or not the two works were really constructed seven years apart is of little relevance; what matters more is Beuys's marking of time according to his own healing course. As has been shown

evident in the reading of *Lebenslauf/Werkslauf*, Beuys has an almost compulsive fascination with dating his life/works. The vitrines in the Block are all represented by dates, the earliest being 1949, and the latest being 1972. The dating method ranges from the ambiguous to the defined. For instance, one cannot ignore the political status of Germany when looking for a reason to why Beuys would mark 1949 as a chronological marker. The 'political vacuum' Willi Brandt spoke of effectively ended when in 1949 the divided German states formed. From this formation and the corresponding aesthetic malaise came the trickle of objects that would come to form the Block. At the other end, 1972 marked two significant shifts in Beuys's life and work. First, was his dismissal, in October of that year, from the Kunstakadamie Düsseldorf, where he was the Professor of Monumental Sculpture.[288] Despite making the most of the publicity the dismissal attracted, the decision devastated Beuys, who was a skilled and committed (albeit radical) pedagogue. It thus also marked Beuys's entry into active political representation, with his founding of the European Organization for Direct Democracy Through Referendum and increasing commitment to Third Way politics.[289] So between 1949 and 1972 we can observe the full range of Beuys's core aesthetic being formed in direct parallel with Germany's, and Beuys's own, political re-emergence from the post-Holocaust vacuum. Within the confines of these dates – indeed, chronologically central – are the dates consigned to *Auschwitz Demonstration*: 1956-1964. What do these dates mean? And what can be read from two, similarly constructed objects being dated so distinctly? The answer to the former question should be evident on the completion of this section, but to assist, it is important to understand why Beuys 'allocates' the dates to certain items, particularly when – as is the case with *1. Ratte* and *Blitz* – they share aesthetic attributes but are constructed some seven years apart. This is certainly one of Beuys's more ambiguous

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[288] "Following years of controversy and conflicts with the school's administration, Beuys was dismissed from his post in 1972. Initially, complaints were filed against Beuys by his fellow professors, who protested his political activities with his students. The final bout of contention, however, that led to Beuys' dismissal was a battle waged against the bureaucracy that governed the school, particularly their policy of "restricted entry" under which only a select number of students could be enrolled. In line with his belief that those who feel they have something to teach and those who feel they have something to learn have the right to come together, Beuys deliberately over-enrolled his classes. The multiple *Democracy is Merry* (1973) was made from a photograph of Beuys with his students being escorted from the school after a sit-in protesting the school's admission policy" Anastasia Shartin "Teaching and Learning" Online resource available at: http://209.32 200 23/beuys/gg12.html (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center). Accessed 10:54, November 5, 2009. Paragraph 4.

[289] Beuys became involved with the *Aktion Dritter Weg* (Campaign for a Third Way) during the early 1970s. For a comprehensive outline of Beuys's active political involvement see Lukas Beckmann's essay "The Causes Lie in the Future" op. cit, Ray. pp. 91-111

references. As with *1. Ratte*, *Blitz* has as its base a sieve filled with straw. Standing in the straw is a common, two-metre measuring ruler folded out in a zigzagged lightning form. Kramer rightly points to the aesthetic spatiality the ruler adds to the vitrine, but also reflects on lightning's link between sky and earth. The base of the 'lightning' is enveloped in a patch of felt, which, according to Beuys's use of the material makes it insulation. This same end of the 'lightning' is painted in the deep, reddy-brown of congealed blood; an effect Beuys produced by mixing paint and hare's blood. The relevance of these touches might be drawn out by looking 'skywards' to the top of the ruler, which is deliberately sawn off at the 42 centimetre mark. Kramer notes that this is the temperature at which the human body reaches dangerous fever, however I accept the alternative reading, in context as more apt. That is, that it points to the year 1942, the year in which the Final Solution was embarked upon:

> The measuring stick becomes a measure of time, a ray of time, beginning in the year 1942, which is considered the actual beginning of the systematic extermination in concentration camps such as Auschwitz-Birkenau.[290]

The felt as insulator of warmth might be seen as a barrier between the dried straw (which would surely burst into flames at a lightning strike) and the lightning. I suspect that the works *1. Ratte* and *Blitz* were not constructed seven years apart, but rather the dates and the representations each straw-filled sieves make correspond to a transforming vision of trauma in Beuys's, and Germany's recovery. As alluded to in the previous section detailing the aesthetic and political meaning of *1. Ratte*, German self-consciousness in the 1950s was still marked by the unspoken presence of murder and suffering. On the other hand *Blitz* was created in the year Beuys, and many other German artists, were coming to the fore with a barrage of highly political *Aktionen* and Happenings. Some might say this bolt of lightning represents the new aesthetic of Beuys – a sharp and painful realization besides the morbid stillness of *1. Ratte.*

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[290] op. cit., Kramer p 266

4.2.6 *Kreuz* 1957

(Fig. 12) Joseph Beuys. *Kreuz* (detail of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*) Mixed Media.

With *Kreuz*, the viewer returns, with Beuys, to 1957 and to Beuys's *Christ*-ian aesthetic. While it is, on the one hand, a very simple element of the greater vitrinal installation – made up of no more than a crudely modeled, brown-clay crucified Christ-figure and an aged communion wafer on a dirty plate – Mario Kramer finds "the plate crucifix…with certainty the most irritating element in this ensemble."[291] Perhaps Kramer refers to the very directness of Beuys's iconography here, at odds with the more subtle, yet equally poignant symbolism of *Fisch* and *1. Ratte*. Consider, too, the controversy surrounding the erection (and subsequent removal), in 1998, of 152 Christian crosses from behind Block 11 at the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial and museum as representative of the taboos surrounding the German churches and Holocaust remembrance. Erected in memory of the 152 Polish Catholic resistance fighters who were executed by the Nazis over the

[291] ibid.

gravel pit at the back of Block 11, the crosses were seen as an insult to those victims who saw the Christian faith as neglectful, if not wholly complicit in their suffering. Rightly, the positioning of the Christ figure at the rear centre of the *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* vitrine, has taken on a particularly troubling meaning. What was Beuys's intention, and what meaning can we extract from this primitive assemblage?

Clearly much of Beuys's *Christ*-ian aesthetic has already been considered. But what is important about the Christ-figure in the vitrinal context, and what does this represent for the philosophy reader? One must be cautious not to fall into the researcher's trap, reviving the adage, "if the only tool you have is a hammer, everything around you starts to look like a nail"[292] Ian Shapiro reminds the researcher of the perils of such an approach, continuing:

> ...more attention to the problem and less to vindicating some pet approach would be less likely to send people on esoteric goose chases that contribute little to the advancement of knowledge...[if] the problem posited are idiosyncratic artefacts of the researcher's theoretical priors, then they will seem tendentious, if not downright misleading, to everyone except those who are wedded to her priors.[293]

So to avert fears of an 'esoteric goose chase' I must remind the reader that analysis of a work of art need not be made up of pure supposition; indeed one of the benefits of contemporary art practice is that the interdisciplinary methodologies available for analysis of a work of art are the same forces that fuel much of the creation of works like *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964.* The hundreds of formal and informal interviews Beuys gave to describe his work, and the very personal nature of this project meant that it can be taken as granted that Beuys expected such detailed analysis of his work, and was thus careful to explain the significance of certain elements of his work. Thus I dispel any notion that concentrating on this aspect of Beuys's work, as 'incarnate' in *Kreuz,* is without important reference to the political conditions of the period. It is a rare glimpse into the aesthetic of Germany's wounded *Geist* during its dazed post-war reconstruction; a spirit thereafter unrestrained by the disgraced churches:

> Hitler and National Socialism had enjoyed considerable support in both German churches, and neither church had resisted the Third Reich as fully as it might have. Both churches experienced

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[292] Ian Shapiro "Problems, Methods, and Theories in the Study of Politics, or What's Wrong with Political Science and What to Do About It" *Political Theory* (Volume 30, no. 4, 2002) p 598.

[293] ibid., p. 601.

> Nazi manipulation and partial control, and persecution of those who resisted...The *Stuttgarter Schuldbekenntnis* ("Stuttgart confession of guilt")...revealed a deep feeling of guilt and blame for the rise and crimes of the Third Reich. They laid the foundations for a doctrinal rethinking, namely the innovative admission that the church had a *political*, as well as spiritual, responsibility.[294]

This extract comes from an article that explicates the shift in the relationship between Church and State in post-war Germany. Central to its argument is the doctrinal shift among the German churches to the tenets of pacifism, and the consequent contribution of the Christian churches to the formation of pacifist political parties (most notably *Die Grunen*). Beuys's relationship with Mennekes is typical of the association between newly radicalized elements of the church and German artists and intellectuals. However, when Friedhelm Mennekes describes Beuys's early Christ/Crucifix imagery, he speaks of it not as an element of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, but as an isolated symbol relevant to his trauma in 1957. In 1957, the unleashing of Christological doctrine from the withered church institutions shaped Beuys's thematic approach. In this state, Mennekes insists:

> Beuys' interest lies in how to re-establish an awareness of the positive impulses that once did and still do emanate from the Crucifixion. They consist above all in the notion of the victory over death and of a release from the destructive abysses in human nature and in the ways that human beings relate to each other. From this early stage onwards Beuys is, therefore, drawn above all to the question of the resurrection.[295]

In the mid-1960s however, Beuys 'abandons' the crumbling Christ-figure at the back of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, on its dusty and chipped plate. Beuys is acknowledging the shamed and crumbling state of the *church as institution* in Germany. It is why, in the context of the greater vitrinal installation created some eight years after the (purported) creation of *Kreuz*, the tone of Beuys's Christian reference changed. *Kreuz* demonstrates how the representation within *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* again prompts contemplation of an array of deeply problematic political issues.

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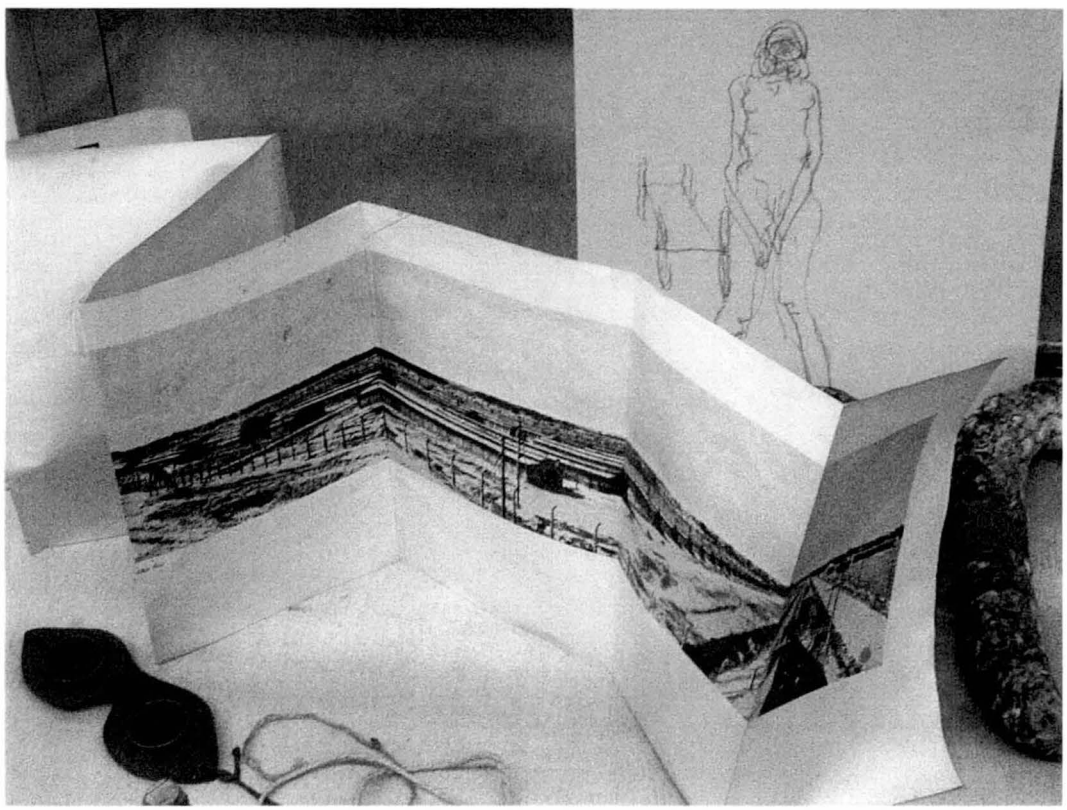
[294] Alice Holmes Cooper "The West German Peace Movement and the Christian Churches: An Institutional Approach" *The Review of Politics* (Volume 50, no. 1, 1988) pp. 77-78.

[295] op. cit., Mennekes. p. 164.

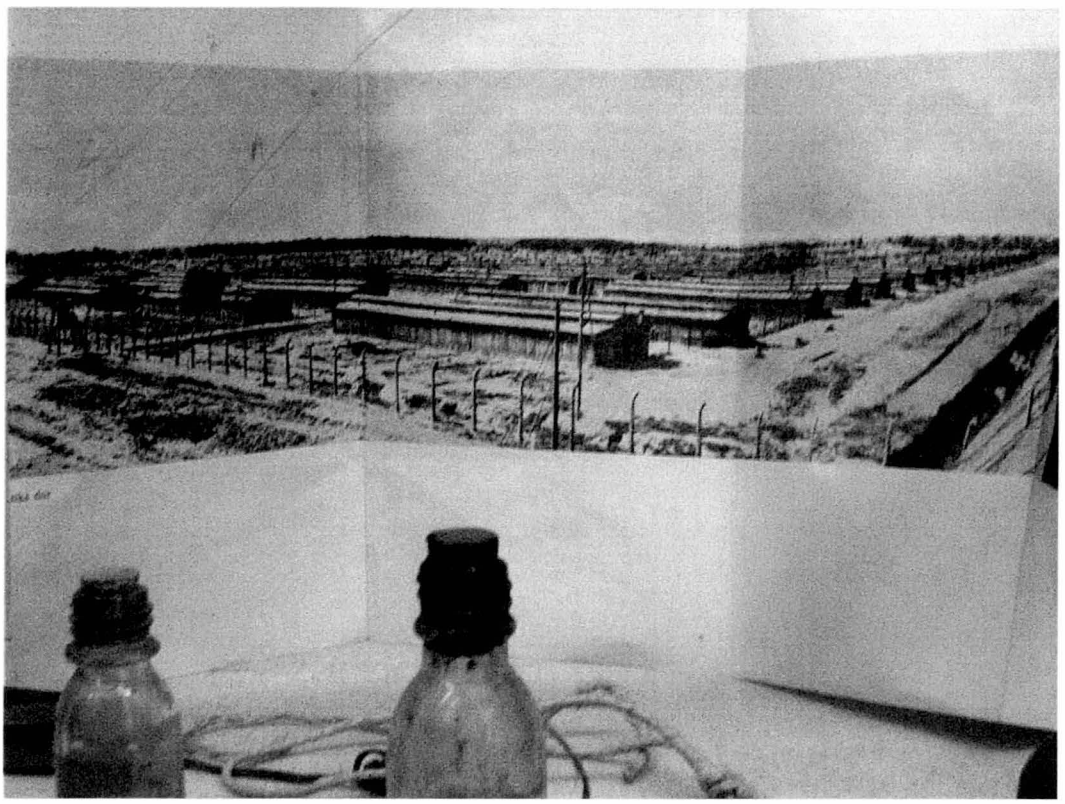
4.2.7 *Auschwitz* 1957

The human condition is Auschwitz, and the principle of Auschwitz finds its perpetuation in our understanding of science and political systems, in the delegation of responsibility to groups of specialists and the silence of intellectuals and artists. I have found myself in permanent struggle with this condition and its roots. I find for instance that we are now experiencing Auschwitz in its contemporary character. This time bodies are outwardly preserved (cosmetic mummification) rather than exterminated, but other things are being eliminated. Ability and creativity are burnt out: a form of spiritual execution, the creation of a climate of fear perhaps even more dangerous because it is refined.[296]



(Fig. 13) Joseph Beuys. *Auschwitz* and *krankes Mädchen, dahinter Krankenwagen*
Detail of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*) Mixed Media.

[296] op. cit., Tisdall. p. 23.



(Fig. 14) Joseph Beuys. *Auschwitz* (detail of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*) Mixed Media.

I share the concern of critics who have presented this provocative statement by Beuys as evidence of a dangerously common misunderstanding (particularly, they fear, among Germans) of the subjectivity of trauma. Beuys's devaluation of the experiences of Holocaust victims is, in this context, worrying. Beuys's tone conveys fair concern over the emphasis on the economic liberalism and intensive material rebuilding underway in West Germany at that time, however in his concern for the political conditioning of the German spirit, he devalues the enormous spiritual and cultural (and consequently, as the troubled history of the Israeli state attests, political) wound that was the Jewish Holocaust. As an active servant in the Nazi war effort, Beuys has a deeply problematic relationship to the Holocaust, which complicates any objective reading of such a statement. Thus, despite Beuys's strength in forging an aesthetic of mourning, rather than a judgement, *Auschwitz* marks a significant moment in Beuys's relationship to the remembrance of the concentration camps and the Final Solution.

There is no immediate ambiguity about *Auschwitz* in title or content. It is a partially unfolded, two-sided plan of the camp; with the floor plan on the rear and a photographic image of the camp on the front, facing the viewer. The zig-zag shape of the partially folded document maintains its standing. This may simply have been an aesthetic

decision, with the vertical display of the document adding depth and tonal quality (in the shadows) to the vitrine's display the flattened document would have been lacking. However the real significance of this *Auschwitz* is its connection to external events:

> In 1958 Beuys participated in the international competition for a monument in the former concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, for which 426 artists enterd designs. The international jury consisted of such renowned artists as Hans Arp, Henry Moore and Ossip Zadkine...Beuys had made about two dozen thematically related sketches and reworked photographs for this. The foldout drawing in the display case...is also a preliminary sketch that Beuys had drawn onto visual material from the competition brochure.[297]

Beuys was unsuccessful in his bid for the monument, however the complete series of drawings remains in the collection of the Museum Schloß Moyland, in the countryside near Kleve, the city of Beuys's youth. The sketches, made in Beuys's idiosyncratic drawing style, described as "highly conceptual diagrammatic notation,"[298] were evidently too spare, or perhaps conceptually demanding for such a project. Nevertheless, Beuys has recycled the contents of the submission, and reshaped the impulse driving its creation by locating parts – such as *Auschwitz* – throughout the Block. Is Beuys's re-use of these parts a *demonstration* (in the context of the vitrine being titled *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*) of Beuys's contribution to the remembrance of the Holocaust? The recurring ambiguity[299] within *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* is maintained here in the shift from an aesthetic of remembrance to a purging of the guilt of perpetration. Increasingly, *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* shapes as a monument to the *acting out* (melancholia) and *working through* (mourning) Germany's/Beuys's trauma. Indeed the very act of re-using imagery in a random and non-linear fashion can be viewed as symptomatic of the experience. Mourning and melancholia – distinct conditions of trauma as explicated first by Freud – are pivotal to understanding the representation of trauma in art. Though texts like Dominick LaCapra's *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*, Harold Schweizer's essay "Mourning, Melancholia, Music: A

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[297] op. cit., Kramer p. 261.

[298] op cit., Temkin and Rose. p. 73.

[299] Another take on the 'ambiguity' of Beuys's work, specifically with regard *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1954*: "Beuys's conceptual "sculpture" is significant ..because it succeeds in evoking a particular combination of hermeneutic undecidability and reflexivity in the aesthetic experience of its various viewers, a conjunction that is central to Kiefer's work as well. "Hermeneutic undecidability" is the ability of a cultural representation to generate not just ambiguity but a conflict of interpretations: radically contradictory readings of the same set of signifiers." op. cit., Biro "Representation and Event: Anselm Kiefer, Joseph Beuys, and the Memroy of the Holocaust" p. 117.

Historiography" (in *History and Memory: Suffering and Art*), or Eric L. Santer's "History beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma" (in *Probing the Limits of Representation*) all draw (either directly or indirectly) from Freud's work, they have shifted the theory away from psychoanalysis towards the more accessible (that is, for this thesis' requirements) theory of what could loosely be described as 'cultural memory.' Schweizer acknowledges LaCapra's indebtedness to Freud in his uncomplicated explanation of the distinction between mourning and melancholia:

> ...LaCapra links the difference between melancholia and mourning to the difference between acting out and working through. While the process of mourning works through a trauma and remembers it as something belonging to the past, acting out, or melancholia, compulsively repeats a trauma that cannot be brought to closure.[300]

This dynamics of this process were being experienced by Beuys in the years *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* represents. Beuys reflected on this in 1973:

> ...war events were no doubt continuing to have an effect, but also current events, for basically something had to die. I think this phase was one of the most essential for me, in so far as I also had to completely reorganize my constitution; I had for too long dragged a body around with me. The initial process was a general state of exhaustion, which quickly however turned into a real process of renewal...Sicknesses are almost always also a psychological crisis in life in which old experiences and thought processes are rejected or are recast into really positive changes.[301]

In his contribution to the revisionary collection *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy* art historian Peter Nisbet adds:

> The circumstances of the Auschwitz vitrine are doubly revealing. Not only do they point to the artists' engagement with his war experiences, but they also point to a moment of fixing, a finalization. This vitrine formed a key part of the large collection of Beuys' work that now forms the famous Beuys Block in Darmstadt, which was to be acquired by the industrialist Karl Ströher around this time. A contract drafted between Beuys and Ströher late in 1967 gives a very clear indication that the artist was conscious of a sense of closing one chapter in his creative life and embarking upon another. The artist, the draft version states, "is experiencing a cæsura in his creativity, a call to fulfil a political plan, the feeling of a pause of perhaps several years, (whether caused or not by this political plan) before a *new creative path.*" Although this remarkably intimate

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[300] Harold Schweizer "History and Memory. Suffering and Art" *Bucknell Review* (Volume 42, no. 2, 1998) p. 112.

[301] Gotz Adriani and Jospeh Beuys, et al. *Joseph Beuys* (Koln· Du Mont Schauberg, 1973) p. 40.

> wording is not found in the final 1969 version, the phrasing unmistakably speaks to an artistic shift of some kind, with politics as a new goal.[302]

The complexities of complicity in the Nazi war effort are staged throughout Beuys's career, but in the presence of this startlingly direct reference to the sites of extermination, the expectations of the viewer are to *work through* the experience with the artist, and emerge, spiritually prepared for the monumental task of reforming Germany's cultural and political landscape. Beuys challenges the notion of the Holocaust as un-representable and, by engaging the viewer with his perception *as perpetrator*, un-knowable.

Beuys's engagement with this difficult subject tempers my judgement of this section's opening quote. Though lacking subtlety, I believe it is less indicative of dormant fascist tendencies and more an insight into how exposed and fragile the German psyche, as embodied by Beuys, was. With this approach, I share Matthew Biro's sentiment, that

> *Auschwitz Demonstration* could thus appear as a necessary 'stage' in the development of German identity: something that had to be conceptually experienced by the individual as part of his or her psychic or moral development.[303]

4.2.8 *krankes Mädchen, dahinter Krankenwagen* 1957

This pencil drawing sits behind the *Auschwitz* document (See Fig. 13). Of rough but determined composition, the drawing depicts a girl, apparently naked, cowering helplessly besides an ambulance stretcher. Again, the surrounding elements lead the viewer to almost immediately assume that this is a representation of a female prisoner, most likely from Auschwitz; but again, greater understanding of Beuys's grander work course throws up varied interpretation. Mario Kramer observes:

> In contrast to the numerous depictions of women in the work of Beuys from the same period, such as actresses, animal-women, mothers, Amazons or shamans, this depiction of the sick girl has nothing at all heroic about it.[304]

It is true that Beuys explored many visions of womanhood during this period, but *krankes Mädchen, dahinter Krankenwagen* is not alone in its aesthetic of suffering and trauma.

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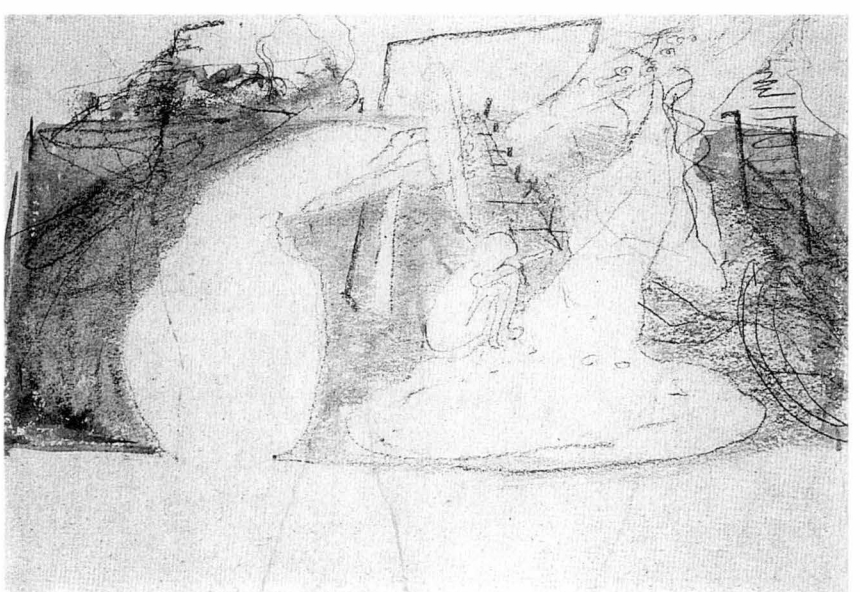
[302] op cit., Nisbet. p. 15.

[303] op. cit., Biro. "Representation and Event: Anselm Kiefer, Joseph Beuys, and the Memory of the Holocaust" p 124.

[304] op. cit , Kramer. p 268

In the first exhibition dedicated to Beuys's drawings[305] a large collection of drawings dated between 1956 and 1958 deal with women and suffering. Much of the imagery Kramer talks of have their origin in the earlier years of the 1950s, and are dominated by representation of, or allusion to the womb and the embodiment of maternal care. Beuys's woman-figure darkens with his own depression, and while maternal images remain, they are tainted with historical reference (Fig. 15 - *Mother with Child*), allegorical reference (Fig. 16 - *Death and the Maiden*) and/or reference to the experimentation and suffering of modern practice (Fig. 17 - *Female Astronaut* and Fig. 18 - *Representation with Critical (-) Objects*).

I will, in this section, divert from the dependence on Adorno as a philosophical referent, as any consideration of Beuys's portrayal of women is best served by engaging with work that considers theories of gender representation. While this illustrates the multiple interpretive tools available to the viewer/reader, it should be stated that this section is in no way indicative of the greater body of feminist art theory, and is necessarily limited in its scope. It serves only as an entry point for a under-documented aspect of Beuys's work; one that might form a significant contribution to the expansive feminist readings of art and art history.



(Fig. 15) Joseph Beuys. *Mother with Child (Two mothers with Child on Railway Track)* (1957) Charcoal and waterclour on paper. 43.2 x 61.5 cm. Öffentliche Kunstammlung, Basel.

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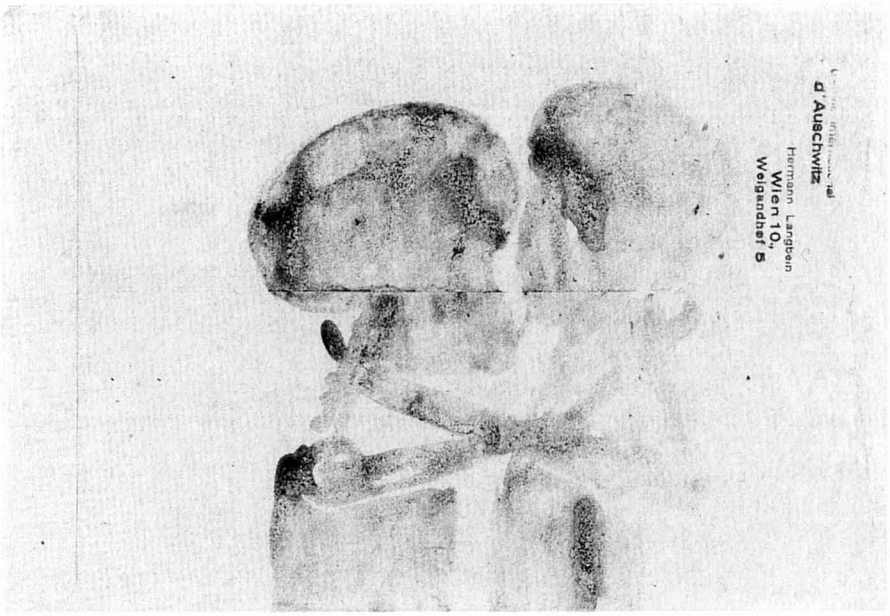
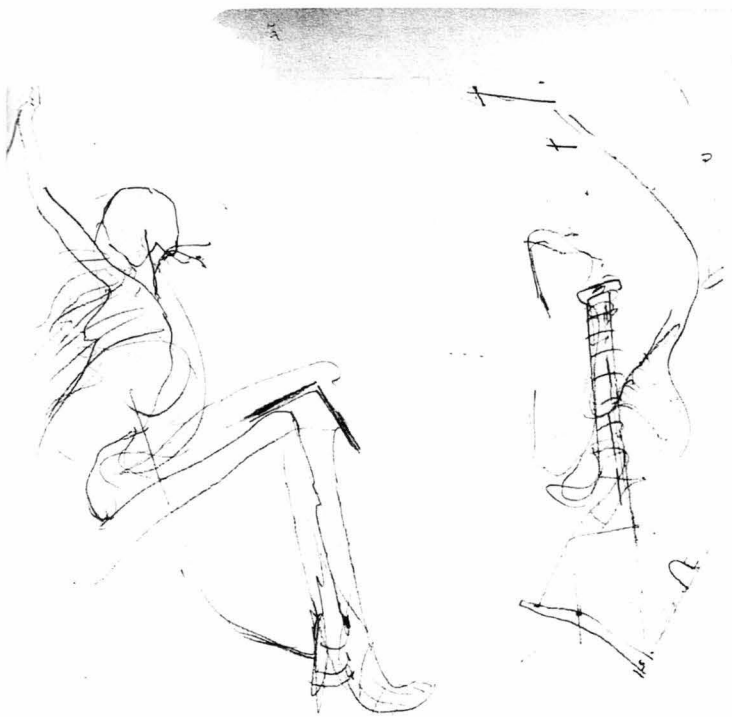
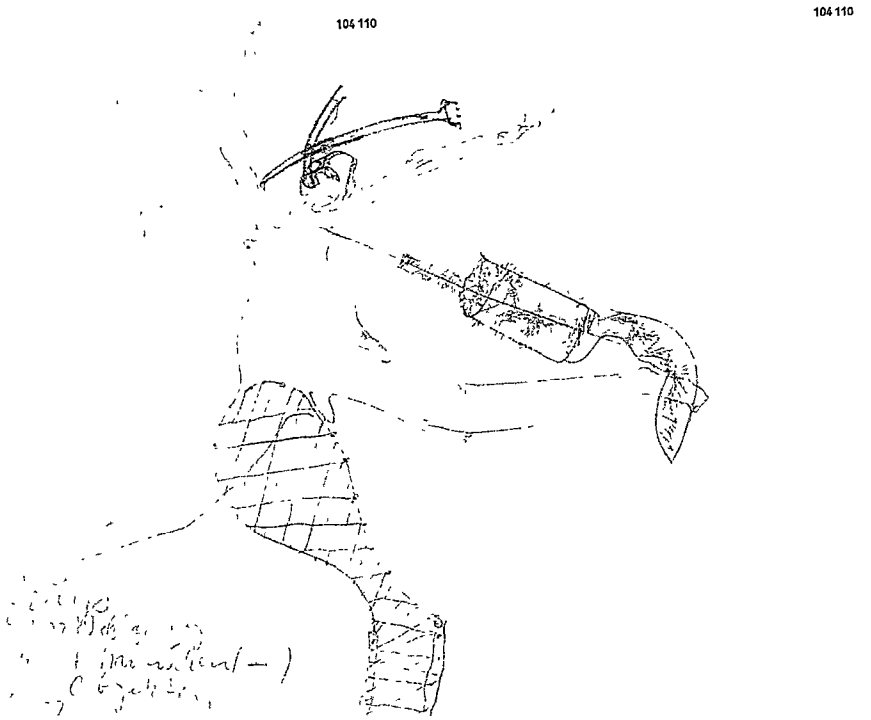
[305] *Thinking Is Form: The Drawings of Joseph Beuys* The Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1993. Exhibition catalogue: op. cit., Temkin and Rose.



(Fig. 16) Joseph Beuys. *Death and the Maiden* (1957)
Watercolour and ink on envelope with stamped lettering.
17.6 x 25.2 cm. Ludwig Rinn Collection, Bonn.



(Fig. 17) Joseph Beuys. *Female Astronaut* (1957) Pencil on paper. 35.5 x 46 cm.
Deutsche Bank AG, Frankfurt/Main



(Fig. 18) Joseph Beuys. *Representation with Critical (-) Objects* (1957) Pencil on paper. 20.8 x 26 9 cm. Ludwig Rinn Collection, Bonn.

The emerging body of critical feminist analysis of Beuys's work is already falling into the camps of skeptic or enthusiast. Of the skeptical camp, Arthur C. Danto considers "...an entire Canadian school of Beuys-critique forwarded by the artists Sturtevant, Clive Robertson, Vera Frankel and Jana Sterbak," as complementing the "widely known critiques by Marcel Broodthaers,"[306] presented earlier in this thesis. While not as vehemently opposed to Beuys's work or greater project as Benjamin Buchloh was in his 1980 essay, most of these artists adopt psychoanalytical method to fuel their aesthetic choices to construct a critique of either the single-mindedness of the Beuysian *Politik*, or his position in the 'art world' as a negatively constructed paternal figure.

Sturtevant is recognised for her duplication of famous work by male artists (notably Marcel Duchamp, Andy Warhol, Frank Stella and Beuys). For example, her rendering of Beuys's *Stuhl mitt Fett* is virtually identical to Beuys's original, housed in room 3 of the

[306] Arthur C Danto "Introduction" Claudia Mesch and Viola Michely. *Joseph Beuys. The Reader* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2007) p. 10.

Block; but perhaps the most poignant work is her (re)staging of Beuys's widely recognized multiple *La Rivoluzione Siamo Noi* (*We Are the Revolution*) (Fig. 20).

Left: (Fig. 19) Joseph Beuys La Rivoluzione Siamo Noi (We Are the Revolution) (1972) Silkscreen with handwritten text and stamp. 191cm x 100cm.

Right: (Fig. 20) Sturtevant Beuys La rivoluzione siamo noi (1988) Serigraphy on paper. 95.5 x 51 cm.

(Fig. 21) Jana Sterbak. *Absorption: Work in Progress* (1995) Photograph mounted on aluminium. 180 x 121 cm. Rene Blouein, Montreal.

In this work, Sturtevant's mimicry questions Beuys's richly aestheticised revolutionary striding "which equates art and social politics, and how discourses on thought, difference, and the body might disrupt it, only to better understand it."[307] Jana Sterbak, on the other hand, "uses mythology to subvert the authoritarian and phallocentric

[307] Author not credited. Exhibition review for *Audio, Video, Disco*, Kunsthalle, Zurich, Switzerland. 24 January - 26 April, 2009. *I Like You: The Artnetwork* (http://www.likeyou.com/en/node/8587) Accessed 12:04, May 7, 2009.

practice of Beuys."[308] In *Undoing big Daddy art: Subverting the Fathers of Western art through a metaphorical and mythological father/daughter relationship* Beata Batorowicz, herself an artist who engages with visual critiques of major 20th century male artists, explicates Sterbak's most direct Beuysian commentary, *Absorption: Work in progress* (Fig. 21). In this work "Sterbak 'transforms' into a moth as a metaphor for her attempt to 'eat away' Beuys' felt suit."[309] Of course critical objections to Beuys's projects are not isolated to women artists, however Sturtevant, Sterbak and Batorowicz provide an interesting backdrop to the reading of Beuys's own representation of womanhood. Their rhetoric certainly leads me to question Beuys's depictions of women. However, neither Sturtevant, Sterbak or Batorowicz challenge Beuys's representation of women directly, nor do they take into account the creative relationships Beuys had with a great number of women, notably

> ...his numerous students, who included Katherina Sievarding, Rosemarie Troeckel and Ulrike Rosenbach; Shelley Sacks, who continues working in 'social sculpture'; and Mary Kelly and Margaret Harrison, who were both involved in the FIU in its early stages.[310]

Rather, their mockery of and/or challenge to Beuys is directed more broadly, taking into account his greater aesthetic and reception. In many senses their work says as much for the patriarchal nature of art historicism than Beuys himself. However, it does beg the question: does, or more importantly, *can* Beuys have an affinity with the suffering of women he depicts? Or, is it, like his depiction of the suffering at Auschwitz, a cynical attempt to distract the viewer from his own prejudice?

Indeed, though the representation of womanhood throughout the Block is overwhelmed by the greater traumatic topos of the Holocaust, it is dominated by an ambiguous sexuality of the subject. As hard as Beuys tries to deny gender specificities in suffering, this sick girl in *krankes Mädchen, dahinter Krankenwagen* represents a particular suffering and shame: the loss of the daughter, of the mother, of the future. In an almost religious return to iconography, Beuys's great concern for the resurrection of his people – all people – is poisoned in the destruction of womanhood.

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[308] Beata Batorowicz. *Undoing big Daddy art: Subverting the Fathers of Western art through a metaphorical and mythological father/daughter relationship.* Doctoral thesis, 2003. p. 93.

[309] ibid

[310] ibid.

As was the case with my response to criticism of his representation of his own trauma as relative to the suffering of the victims, I defend Beuys against the negative claims, but with greater reservation; that is, the more one is detached from one's own experience, the more difficult it is to present plausible sympathetic depiction of experience. Thus, the depiction of traumatised women can not, I believe, be considered as such, and can only, therefore, be viewed as stark and brutal representations by a male perpetrator. Naturally, this raises major questions about Beuys's own perception of gender and sexuality and has the potential to open a psychoanalytical 'can of worms.' The limitations of this thesis render such an opening untenable, however I would again circumvent any negative criticism of this work and this methodological turn by stating simply that Beuys's (or for that matter, any man's) representation of women is important – even if startling and controversial – for the very fact that it opens discourse. Of course, this reading is diplomatic in its neutrality, but is indicative of the kind of objectivity necessary to read such complex work as *thought taking form.*

(Fig. 22) Joseph Beuys. +- *Würst* (detail of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*) Mixed Media.

Perhaps the most extraordinary feature of this vitrine – indeed of Beuys's *complete* body of work – is the presence of decayed and mummified foodstuffs. Nothing is testimony

more to the complete transformation in aesthetic practice following 1945 than the use of materials once outside the norms of prewar practice. Marcel Duchamp is the clear progenitor of the turn that leads to Beuys's work. But Beuys's use of four hooped lengths of blood-sausage extend Duchamp's project by adding the aesthetic of decay. Duchamp's urinals and bottle-racks[311] may be – like the sausages – *every-day objects*; but the porcelain and galvanized iron remain unchanged as monuments to their moment. For Beuys, time becomes a defining contributor to the aesthetic as it marks the decay of the foodstuffs. Dr. Klaus Pohl conceded that most of the deterioration was stabilized by means of advanced systems within the museum regulating temperature and humidity.[312] However, nothing prepares the viewer for the vast assortment of jars filled with rancid, often separated liquids (Figs. 23 and 24); the chunks of mottled white-brown chocolate strewn throughout the installation; the completely mummified whole loaves of bread (which are, according to Dr. Pohl, the most difficult to protect from disintegration); and, in *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, the shocking presence of the four blood-sausages, nudged disturbingly between the cold realism of *Auschwitz* and the pencil-line trauma of the sick girl in *krankes Mädchen, dahinter Krankenwagen.* Both elements, and the cloth beneath, are stained by the fat that has sickered from the sausages.

(Fig. 23) Joseph Beuys. Detail of vitrine in room 7 of The Block Beuys. Mixed Media.

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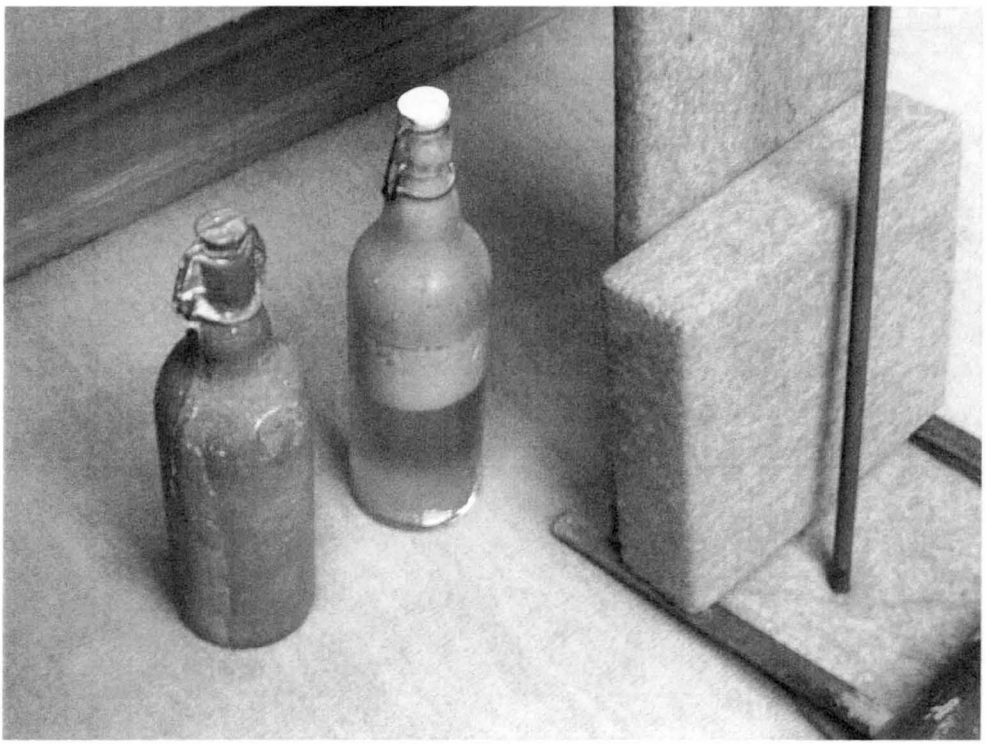
[311] Titled *Fountain* and *Bottle Rack* respectively, these works represent Duchamp's challenge to traditional aesthetics and notions of art, and are thus among the most recognised/recognizable works. As an interesting aside, relative to this thesis (in particular the temporal aspects of both Beuys's and Darboven's work) they have 'unusual' temporality registered in their title, as well: *Fountain* is dated 1917/1964, and *Bottle Rack* is dated 1914/1964.

[312] Intervew with Dr. Klaus Pohl, Senior Curator in charge of The Block Beuys, Hessisches Landesmuseum, October 28, 2004.



(Fig. 24) Joseph Beuys. Detail of installation in room 2 of The Block Beuys. Mixed Media.

As if by design, Beuys prompts the viewer to make an impulsive judgement on this gross vision, before becoming distracted by the trails of expanded reference winding throughout the vitrine, the room, the Block, and into Beuys's life. Note the corresponding pattern with each element. This is, I believe, central to the philosophical value such works proffer; the capacity to engage the viewer and force assessment and counter-assessment through the absorption of visual signals. The corporeality of the decayed blood-sausages in the vicinity of (indeed, touching) the representations of Auschwitz, is transformed by the orderly but primitive positive (+) and negative (-) signs Beuys's has applied. My first impressions were of a row of horse-shoe magnets, and Kramer acknowledges that a "battery effect and a cycle of energy are indicated."[313] Kramer also "senses an absurd black humour" in this work; one can only imagine he is alluding to the extermination camps as 'processing factories.' Kramer might find this plausible, however I have my doubts about this in light of Beuys's more contemplative tone. I would rather consider Beuys as an ironist; in this light, the food represents a shameful offering, to the victims of Auschwitz, even more poignant as it rots in its vitrine, making mockery of the equation – FOOD = ENERGY. It reveals the confusion

[313] op. cit., Kramer. p. 268.

among Germans of how to deal with this past, exposing the uselessness of tokenism. The decayed offering, impotent as energy, represents the need for an entire reconsideration among Germans of how to deal with the political trauma following the Holocaust. This element, at first distracting in its cruel banality amidst representation of mass murder, shapes as being a critical fragment in Beuys's political vision.

4.2.10 *Nichterkennungsmarke (Aluminium)* 1960; *Flasche mitt Fett (fest)* 1962; *Flasche mit Fett (liquide)* 1962; *JOD (Flasche)* 1962; *Aus: Actions/Agit Pop/De-Collage/Happening/Events/Antiart/L'Autrisme/Art Total/Refluxus 20 Juli 1964 Aaachen* 1964

(Fig. 25) Joseph Beuys. *Nichterkennungsmarke (Aluminium)*; *Flasche mitt Fett (fest)*; *Flasche mit Fett (liquide)*; *JOD (Flasche)*; *Aus: Actions/Agit Pop/De-Collage/Happening/Events/Antiart/L'Autrisme/Art Total/Refluxus 20 Juli 1964 Aachen.* (detail of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*) Mixed Media.

This somewhat jumbled collection of words is the collective title of the five items that sit together in a central point of the vitrine. Even in translation, there is little to give away the significance of these items in the vitrine. Starting with *Nichterkennungsmarke (Aluminium)* and going counter-clockwise, the elements are *Non-Identification Tag (Aluminium)*; *Bottle with Fat (Solid)*; *Bottle with Fat (Liquid)* and *Iodine (Bottle)* (Fig. 25). The final agglomeration of references is for the goggles that have alternately been titled *Sun Lamp Goggles*. As I have explained the origins of Beuys's fascination with fat as a sculptural medium in previous sections, all I will add here is my interest in the substance being presented here, bottled, and in two distinct states (*fest* and *liquide*). A medical aesthetic prevails in the arrangement of the 'fat bottles' and a bottle of iodine (*JOD*). Dr. Gunter Wolf, Professor of Medicine at the Universität Hamburg recognises Beuys's unique use of these materials.

> Since antiquity, many artists have used medical themes as subjects in their work. However, few visual artists use medical subjects broadly, interweaving them through their oeuvres as metaphors for social and political problems[314]

In addition to the import Beuys's places on fat as a substance that represents insulation (as drawn from his Tatar experience) and transformation (from solid to liquid according to heat), Beuys's use of iodine opens a myriad of interpretation, as the substance is, according to its use, either a poison or a life-saving ingredient. Iodine deficiency is recognised by the United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition as "the single most common cause of preventable retardation"[315] and is an essential trace element used to disinfect wounds and to sanitize water for drinking. Yet, in its pure, unadulterated form, it is a poison. The essential powers of healing and malevolent potential for execution are both in the phials, awaiting dispense. However, in their vitrinal confines they remain untouched, leaving the viewer with the infinite cycle of questioning: "What was/is Beuys's/Germany's intention? To heal or to poison?" Again, the notions of healing and poisoning inter-reference Beuys's spiritual and psychological vision, but they continue to

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[314] Gunter Wolf. "'Show Your Wound' Medicine and the Work of Joseph Beuys" *Annals of Internal Medicine* (Volume 133, no 11, 2000) p. 928.

[315] Information sourced from United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition. Data available at: http://www.unsystem.org/scn/Publications/AnnualMeeting/SCN25/iodinedeficiency.html Accessed 14:34, February 23, 2009.

point to a political solution. The aluminium name-tag is given the playful title *Non-Identification Tag*, acting as a new representation of the *unknown soldier*; no longer a heroic vision but a possessor of the potential for care and harm simultaneously. After Auschwitz, heroism and German militarism are not compatible. The political repercussions of (then US President) Ronald Reagan's visit to the Bitburg Memorial Cemetery in 1985 are evidence of how deep-seated this conviction was. I persist with this reading of the tag belonging to the imaginary perpetrator (Beuys?) as it maintains the impression that this is a *demonstration* of Beuys *working through* his role as perpetrator. Perhaps more than representing the anonymity of the perpetrator, the nameless tag symbolises the shame and denial of complicity. The scraggly twine that has become the nameless tag's lanyard is laid over the leather strip bound to the adjacent goggles, the final and most laboriously titled item in the vitrine. In investigation, we are taken again, from the confines of the vitrine to that (aforementioned) moment in Beuys's *Aktion*: *Kukei/Akopee-nein/Brown cross/Fat corners/Model Fat corners* where right-wing activists rushed the stage and attacked Beuys. The goggles – then called *Sun Lamp Goggles* – were to be used in the final stages of the *Aktion*. The bloodied and battered Beuys, overwhelmed by the moment, discarded the remaining acts for his defiant – indeed, defining – stance. The goggles, however, would find their place in *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, a defining symbol of blindness, or sightlessness in the face of creativity; the very source of the attack on Beuys. As a collective, this arrangement repeats the reference to healing (the blind, the wounded, the insane), the act Beuys simply demanded: *"Show me your wound"*

OVERVIEW: 'SHOW YOUR WOUND'

> Most of us go through life hiding our wounds or managing as best we can. The idea of 'show your wound' is a devastatingly radical one which lays you open to all sorts of vulnerabilities, obviously. But Beuys regarded 'show your wound' as the secret to being an artist. You weren't showing your magnificence and your wealth of ideas and your huge creativity, you were showing your vulnerability.[316]

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[316] Caroline Tisdall. "Joseph Beuys: Bits and Pieces" *Tate Modern Talk* (London: Tate Museum, 2005) Transcript available: http://www.culturalreuse org/bitsandpieces.pdf. Accessed 11:37, November 5, 2009. Paragraph 3.

This extract from a lecture given by (long-time friend and curatorial collaborator with Beuys) Caroline Tisdall to accompany the Tate Modern's 2005 exhibition *Joseph Beuys: Actions, Vitrines, Environments* defines Beuys's aesthetic project for the twenty years (and, arguably beyond) following the Second World War. The notion of the spiritual, psychological and political *wound* from which Germany and Germans needed to recover became Beuys's obsession, culminating, I believe, in *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964.* Beuys's conceptualisation of *the wound* had evolved beyond what is "experienced by every person as they come into contact with the hard material conditions of the world through birth,"[317] to become the central aesthetic and thematic condition of his work. Its expansive meaning matched Beuys's greater artistic project, as recognised by Ann Temkin, who saw it as "immediately establish[ing] Beuys's strategy in conflating the rituals of life and art."[318] Furthermore, in 1985, less than a year before his death, Beuys had opened a speech entitled "Talking About One's Own Country: Germany" with the statement: "Once again I should like to start with the wound," continuing with the proclamation that this wound could become instead a mark of healing.[319] And as recently as 2004, Mark Rosenthal (in his contribution to the catalogue accompanying the *Joseph Beuys: Actions, Vitrines, Environments* exhibition[320]) declared:

> ...his initial suturing procedure...[is] reconceived as an art procedure, with both having identical healing effects. And from the first entry to the last, the wound has been transferred from his own body to the body-politic of his country.[321]

Thus, 'the wound' has become more than a metaphor; for Beuys it had become the personal and collective political and psychological manifestation of Germany's past. A *wound* is an infliction as yet unhealed; one that will leave a scar, yes, but one that must be healed. By considering and titling this work a *demonstration*, Beuys evokes activism and exhibit. It is as an exhibit, a museum-piece of crystallized creative thought that this work

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[317] op. cit., Tisdall and Beuys. *Joseph Beuys.* p 10.

[318] op cit., Temkin and Rose p. 11

[319] Central to this healing was the establishment of a social and political theory of art, which Beuys credited as: ".. the only way of overcoming all the surviving racist machinations, terrible sins, and indescribable darkness without losing sight of them even for a moment." Joseph Beuys "Talking About One's Own Country: Germany" Wilfred Wiegand et al. *Joseph Beuys: In Memoriam Joseph Beuys; Obituaries, Essays, Speeches* (Bonn: Inter Nationes, 1986) p. 35.

[320] *Joseph Beuys· Actions, Vitrines, Environments* Tate Modern, London. February 4 – May 2, 2005.

[321] Mark Rosenthal. "Joseph Beuys. Staging Sculpture" in Mark Rosenthal (ed.) *Joseph Beuys Actions, Vitrines, Environments* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004) p. 13.

holds significant value as a representation of the collective trauma in post-war Germany. It is a call to the activation of the healing that must hasten the transformation of the wound to scar.

Irrespective of its impact on the viewer, *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* continues to polarise and refuses to conform to the usual pattern of avant-gardism absorbed by the mainstream cultural production. That Beuys's aesthetic model short-circuits this consumptive condition is significant in Adorno's terms. The parasitic bond broken, Beuys's project has the freedom to exist within its own conditions. Beuys's egoism in relation to this freedom is understandably problematic for many; however it must be agreed that he has – through sheer force of self-belief, physical production and espousal – convinced us that we must, at the very least, consider him.

PART TWO – VARIATIONS & DEPARTURES

1. ENTRY

The second part of this thesis marks a departure from the first, whilst acknowledging the methodological foundation of its premise. The first part was principally a monograph outlining the 'philosophy' of Joseph Beuys as formed in his work, and its relation to the contemporary philosophies of, amongst others, Theodor Adorno. This involved a detailed investigation into the historical and personal conditions contributing to both the creation and reception of Beuys's work, providing the reader with an extensive body of information with which to enter the 'viewing stage' of her or his own reception.

In this second phase of the thesis this model is applied to the reading of three more works, but with respective variations. I consider each of these studies as consolidating the founding premise while simultaneously transgressing its claims by way of their particular qualities and capacity to engage the viewer. That the second and third works, respectively, are created by German artists working after Beuys, lends a coherence to the thesis, allowing the reader to build a sense of the historical and cultural circumstances that contribute to concepts like 'movements' or 'artistic inheritance.' That the final work is a direct response to these works, and the philosophical works with which they are herein associated, seals the arrangement as an aesthetic and theoretical closure, albeit one that calls for the reader to consider art, from that point on, anew.

The first work – Anselm Kiefer's *Notung* – is approached in much the same manner as Beuys's *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, with the following considerations affecting the outcome. First, *Notung* is a painting, not a part of an installation. Second, *Notung* is, in its aesthetic construction and style, more immediately simple than *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*. Third, Kiefer is a living, practicing artist whose life and practice is a

generation removed from Beuys and thus witness to a different set of historical and personal conditions. Fourth, *Notung* was not, at the time of viewing, publicly exhibited. Finally, the availability of critical readings of Kiefer's work is not as extensive as that of Beuys. The results of, or response to these differences is, accordingly: First, an explanation of how other art genres and media (here, perhaps not so radically, a painting) are open to this interpretive method; Second, a different construction of the chapter's thematic explication; Third, an outlining of the conditions Kiefer experienced and the relationship these have to the creation of the work; Fourth, as authorisation was from curators at the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam to view the work, the relationship the viewer has with the work is considered differently and; Finally, a more compact reading of Kiefer's reception with an expansion of my own, critical approach.

The second work – Hanne Darboven's *Kulturgeschichte 1880–1983* – is, likewise, considered within the methodological framework established in the chapters concerning *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, with the following considerations affecting the outcome. First, while *Kulturgeschichte 1880–1983* returns to the multiple-room installation format, and shares qualities with the Block Beuys, the historical and cultural conditions of its production were, like Kiefer's, bound more to her engagement with making art (to recall Adorno's point of reference) *after* Auschwitz, as opposed to a life *bound to* Auschwitz; Second, Darboven's location and aesthetic concerns are removed from both Beuys and Kiefer; Third, at the time of writing, *Kulturgeschichte 1880–1983* was not on public display and; Finally, there is a significantly more limited body of critical appraisal of Darboven's work than either Beuys or Kiefer. The response to these differences is, accordingly: First, further discussion about how different aesthetic and creative impulses can be understood between shared materials and media; Second, an explication of the conditions within which Darboven worked and the theoretical force driving her art; Third, an investigation into how the reader/viewer is able to interpret a work of art that is neither rendered nor made available *at all* for viewing, which leads into an investigation into new means of accessing visual works, with particular reference to internet resources, and; Finally, a compact, yet thorough progression into the critical reception of Darboven's work.[322]

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[322] I should add that during the final stages of writing this chapter, a book on this very work – *Hanne Darboven: Cultural History 1880-1983*, by Dan Adler – was published by Afterall Press as part of their *One Work* series Naturally, Adler's text is a significant addition and contribution to studies of Darboven's work, but appeared problematically positioned

Though significant, the differences evident in the reading of the works of Kiefer and Darboven still guide the reader through the process of critically evaluating works of art as works of philosophy. In the final part of this thesis I will use the same critical process to engage with a fourth work of art, but will depart more radically from the methodology to do so. So this thesis might open the door to further consideration of the relationship between thought and form, I have chosen to offer an investigation of a work of art of my own making in order to add a critical feature missing in the significant majority of critical theoretical investigations into art: a first-hand, artist's account.

In the chapter concerning the work in question - *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008* – I provide an exhaustive defence of my decision to include this work in this thesis, particularly with regard to the work's place alongside works by three revered 20th century artists. However, the core argument in my defence is centred on the privileged position I hold as a practicing artist working within philosophy, and the opportunity this brings for the reader to engage with this hitherto understated relationship. Furthermore, as I consider the work a response to the artists and philosophers encountered during the course of this thesis, I cannot see it as anything less than integral to the process.

Thus this thesis has come to take this form:

- First, a major, methodology forming monograph on an artist and his work and his relationship to a philosophical peer and his work;
- Second, a methodology confirming study of other, historically and culturally related artists and their works, and their relationship to their philosophical peers and their work;
- Finally, a methodological extension leading beyond the confines of the thesis with a view from within the creation of a work of art (the enacting of *thought taking form*) that is informed by, and engages with the creative and philosophical studies within the thesis.

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as a thorough examination of the very work I have chosen to write about However, due to variations on theme and approach between Adler's monograph and my own, Adler's contribution became a validation of the importance of Hanne Darboven as a subject for research. See Introduction for details of publisher's intent regarding the series.

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That there is no generic style running through the works as presented herein is precisely the indication required to posit this thesis' premise with assurance. Too narrow a scope would likewise limit the application of the ideas presented. Admittedly, the dominance of conceptualism is significant, but reflects the infiltration of theory into the broader 'art world.' Exceptions must be drawn, too. Just as any text cannot be considered philosophy, any image cannot be considered in this light. Naturally, any text may *become* the focus for philosophical inquiry, and, consequently, any image may, too. One need only turn, for example, to Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*, and its observation of the semiotic and philosophical substratae of expression in commercial popular culture.[323] However, just as those at the vanguard of philosophical thought have practices and acts recognisable as 'what-is-known-as' philosophy, I too, expect that an artist engaging with these same matters might be considered philosophers were it not for their differentiating representational practices and acts. Thus, though the artists and works selected were taken from an impossibly long list, they represent an expansion of possibility for the consideration of *thought taking form.*

Perhaps the most significant development this section introduces is the consideration of the work of art's capacity to conflate various theories within the immediacy of its imagery. That is not to say that the works herein facilitate this conflation in ways *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* could not. Indeed, during the course of the section detailing Beuys's work in parallel with Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, I suspect many-a reader might have considered alternative philosophical works as complementary. My decision to refer primarily to Adorno was driven by a desire to introduce the reader to the methodology by way of temporally and topically related works. Having done so, I can enter this investigation with a broader scope and, thus, explicate a particular quality in visual art that serves to highlight its special place as philosophical form. I will, from this position, be able to show how works might also thrive in *opposition* to philosophical trends, and thus contribute to the discourse as an 'other'. The imagined relationship between Kiefer and Jürgen Habermas is a case in point. However, the 'otherness' of Habermas's text is perhaps most evident in aesthetic terms, and not only in content. The clinical style of Habermasian text appears almost antithetical to the raggedly worked surface of Kiefer's painting. Importantly, I choose to avoid the pitfalls of associating art

[323] Roland Barthes. *Mythologies* (1972) (London: Vintage, 1993)

and philosophy on aesthetic terms alone. In doing so, I avoid the fracturing of philosophy from art along disciplinary lines, showing how theory usually overlooked or omitted from Art School curricula is just as significant in the reading of a work of art – if not moreso – than philosophy committed to questions of aesthetics and art. In this instance, I use Habermas's theory of communicative action and the related question of subjectivity as represented in Kiefer's painting. Thus, while Adorno's traces are present throughout, the generational shift away from Beuys is no more clear than in Kiefer's monumental work of 1973, *Notung*, which is served by reference to Habermas, himself a generation removed from Adorno. I should mention two curiosities here that the informed reader may have already noted. First, is that there is an extensive monograph – Matthew Biro's *Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* – that outlines the relationship between artist and philosopher, shadowing my decision to bind Kiefer to Adorno. Second, is that the relationship between Habermas and Kiefer (or any artist, for that matter) might be marked by the belief, stated here by David Ingram, that

> It is hard to imagine anyone associated with the Frankfurt School whose work, in manner of form as well as content, is so far removed from the aesthetic as that of Jürgen Habermas.[324]

My response to the first of these matters is to a simple acknowledgement of Biro's excellent and comprehensive work, which essentially deems foolish any attempt to present an abbreviated or simplified revisiting of this relationship. The relationship between Kiefer and Frankfurt School critical theory, on the other hand, is as yet only marginally explored, and thus even my moderate construction of this relationship serves, at the very least, as an opening for more serious engagement. To the second, and I believe most important matter, I would like to concur with Ingram, but point out that it is precisely Habermas's 'removal from the aesthetic' that validates Kiefer's work in the socio-political and cultural conditions he worked within, and highlights the disparity between the fields of art and philosophy that was not quite so evident as it was between Beuys and Adorno.

What is interesting in the philosophical relationship between Kiefer and Habermas is the divergent paths the two men took in presenting their 'demands' for resolution of

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[324] David Ingram "Habermas on Aesthetics and Rationality: Completing the Project of Enlightenment" *New German Critique* (Volume 53, 1991) p. 67.

Germany's trauma. It must be added that Habermas's apparent departure from the aesthetic is regarded as such according to a rather traditional reading, and that his regard for the aesthetic is politicised so as to represent a condition of the "life-world"[325] as opposed to the bureaucratisation of reconciliation. In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Terry Eagleton explains:

> Habermas's is an academicist mind, aloofly remote from the sphere of political action; but his work nevertheless represents a political strike for the life-world against administrative rationality...he thus writes as a political 'aesthetician', defending the lived against the logical, *phronesis* against *episteme*. Indeed art itself is for Habermas one crucial place where the jeopardized resources of moral and affective life may be crystallized...It is this aesthetic 'dimension' of Habermas's work which the customary, sometimes merited criticism of his excessive rationalism frequently overlooks.[326]

There is an imagined empathy in Kiefer for Habermas's concern for this distinction, yet Habermas's unformed model "for the life-world to be brought effectively to bear on a reified public system"[327] inadvertently carves a schism between the traditional aesthetic concerns of the painter (that Kiefer still bears, irrespective of his progressive intent) and the notion of the newly formed aesthetic concerns of Habermas. In breaching this gap, this thesis forges its next step toward explicating the significance of considering the relationship between art and philosophy as *thought taking form.*

Any continuing engagement with Frankfurt School theory evokes the spectres of Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche, and they reappear accordingly, however, perhaps the most novel extension in this section is the introduction, by way of the artists themselves, of musical composition to the fray. Richard Wagner becomes a central figure in Kiefer's work, while Darboven's engagement with avant-garde musical composition contributes a distinctive quality to her aesthetic. That these seemingly disparate musical forces converge during the course of this chapter uncovers a fascinating substratum to the study.

That the following investigation is more compact will be favourable to many after the

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[325] Jurgen Habermas. "Modernity – An Incomplete Project" Hal Foster (ed.) *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, Washington. Bay Press, 1983) p. 14.

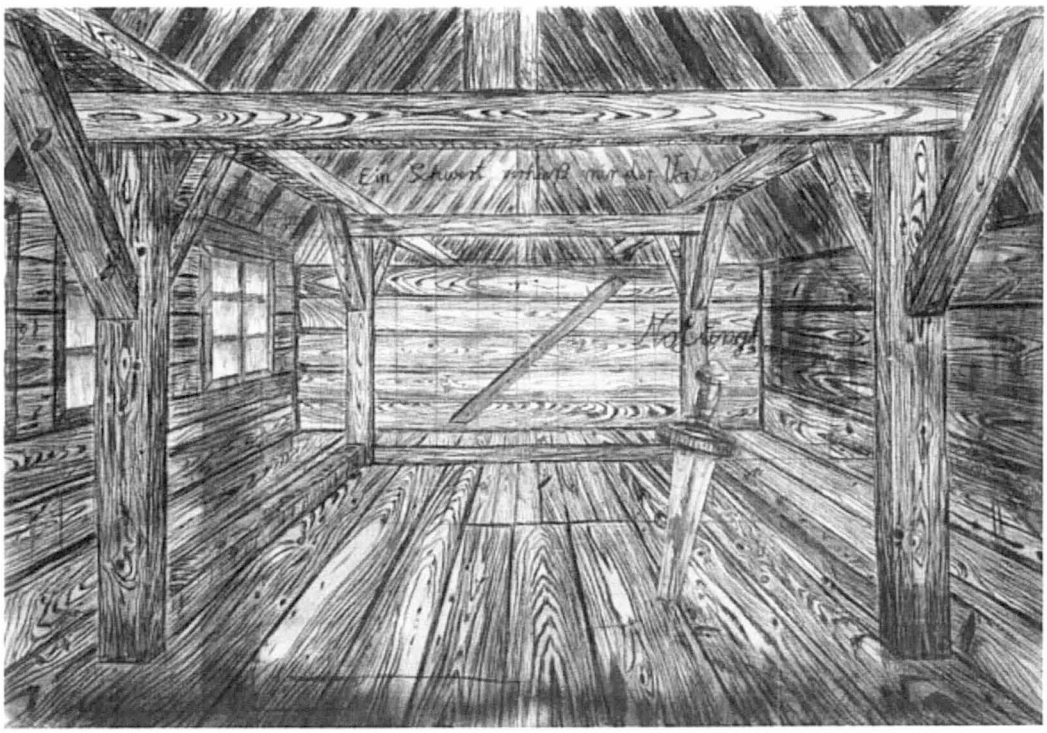
[326] Terry Eagleton. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1990) p 402.

[327] ibid.

denseness of the reading of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*. While *Notung* would certainly benefit from a more thorough explication this section provides an abbreviated format for reading a work of art. Armed with the breadth and depth of methodological possibility upon departing the Beuysian exploration, this reading illustrates how the reader may now select her or his own interpretation according to the supporting cultural and/or historical text at hand. That is to say, that while the reading presented herein is built upon the foundation of thorough research, the expansive scope of the work opens a range of alternative readings. If the reader emerges from this chapter with a framework upon which to craft their own, alternative readings, then certain success has been achieved.

The most notable difference herein is the lesser emphasis on Kiefer's and Darboven's reception, forged, very simply, by the fact that the critical dissection of their work (though increasingly thorough in the case of Kiefer) is itself more limited. This is in part because, unlike Beuys, neither Kiefer's nor Darboven's projects were bound up with any active engagement with Nazi Germany, and the reverence for them has for some time now been strong, and remains undiminished. I will explore the critical appraisal of Kiefer, noting, in particular, the three substantial texts outlining his work's relationship to philosophy and cultural history – Matthew Biro's *Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger*, John C. Gilmour's *Fire on the Earth: Anselm Kiefer and the Postmodern World* and Lisa Saltzman's *Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz* – without forming the distinction between the phases of reception experienced by Beuys during his life and after. As Kiefer has (with the exception of a brief period in his formative years) been almost universally praised for his intelligent rendering of complex themes, these two texts are significant for what they contribute to the theoretical reading of Kiefer's works rather than for any variation in appraisal. The most important feature was the stark difference between his reception in Germany and outside Germany. I will come to explain this shortly, but first I outline the aforementioned conditions that make this chapter, and, most importantly, Anselm Kiefer and *Notung*, an important contribution to this thesis.

2. ANSELM KIEFER – *NOTUNG*



(Fig. 26) Anselm Kiefer. Notung (1973) 300 x 432 cm. Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

> 'Concentration' was…the motto of Kiefer's intensive, yearlong bout of creativity in 1973, when, living in his remote seclusion he produced ten or so masterworks that laid the foundations of his pictorial universe.[328]

In the previous chapter I considered how Kiefer's former teacher, Joseph Beuys, worked for the reconstruction of the German psyche and spirit through creative action, forging aesthetic and political channels along which the *working-through* process might be enacted. Already complicated by his complicity as a *Luftwaffe* pilot, this approach heightened Beuys's susceptibility to historical negligence; a cause for concern among certain critics. Nevertheless, even Beuys's most damning critics now concede that for better or for worse, his work exerted (indeed, still exerts[329]) considerable influence on the aesthetic and political terrain of post-Holocaust Germany. After all, it is the very terrain from whence artists like Kiefer set off on their own creative paths. In explaining the factors

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[328] Markus Brüderlin. "Attic Paintings 1973" Foundation Bayeler (ed.) *Anselm Kiefer the Seven Heavenly Palaces 1973-2001* (Basel: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2001) p. 37.

[329] See "Beuys and After: Why Today's Artists Still Chew the Fat" Martin Herbert *Modern Painters* (February, 2005) pp. 60-67 and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh's essay "Re-considering Beuys, Once Again" op. cit., Ray.

that contributed to choosing *Notung*, an opportunity arises to explain the factors in Kiefer's own life that took him to the production of these 'Attic works.'

In 1966, after a year of studying law and Romance languages at Albert Ludwigs Universität in Freiburg, Kiefer shifted his enrolment to the city's Staatliche Hochschule der Bildenden Künste. Here, he studied for four years under the tutelage of painters Peter Dreher and Horst Antes, before moving to Düsseldorf, where he studied with Beuys (who was, by then, busy with the assembly of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*). But despite the significance and impact of Beuys's tutelage, Kiefer pursued an aesthetic project within which he, as a *German*, became historically re-engaged. Jürgen Habermas considered this a critical social and political matter:

> Now as before, the simple fact remains that even those born later have grown up in a form of existence in which *those things* were possible. Our own life is linked inwardly, and not just by accidental circumstances, with that context of life in which Auschwitz was possible. Our form of existence is connected with the form of existence of our parents and grandparents by a mesh of family, local, political and intellectual traditions which is difficult to untangle – by an historical milieu, therefore, which in the first instance has made us what we are and who we are today.[330]

Kiefer was a baby – only two months old – when the German forces made their unconditional surrender, effectively ending the war in Europe; yet he understood the shared, or 'linked' historical and cultural liability, and the heightened urgency with which he/Germany needed to (r)evoke this historical space. Kiefer's work towards this healing (r)evocation of Germany's past fits within the grander project; *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or 'coming to terms with the past.' Kiefer was at a creative and productive peak when *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* was germinated in the radical activism of West Germany in the late 1960s. In the seminal text *Kant After Duchamp*, Thierry de Duve clearly defines the distinct conditions of this time:

> Student upheaval, hard-line leftist politicisation, extraparliamentary opposition, disgust with consumer society and the German *Wirtschaftswunder*, and soon terrorism tinted the German landscape of the hippie period with a pessimism, an anxiety, and an unbearable guilt-complex absent this side of the Atlantic. What was in the States a mild, Whitmanesque revival of the American Dream only subliminally spoiled by an unjust and not yet lost war expressed itself in

[330] Jurgen Habermas. "Concerning the Public Use of History" *New German Critique* (Volume 44, 1988) pp. 43-44.

> Germany as the most contradictory need to heal a society traumatized by its own monstrous past.[331]

As is evident in Kiefer's work (and in the works of countless contemporaries[332]) the project became culturally consolidated in the 1970s, before its dissonant forms became politically manifest in the *Historikerstreit* of the mid 1980s.[333] *Historikerstreit* was a heated academic debate over how the acts and ideals of Nazism should be known and remembered. While Kiefer 'reads' well within a Habermasian 'frame,' one must be conscious of the fact that *Notung* precedes the nexus of the *Historikerstreit* by some thirteen years.[334] Habermas's thoughts are critical to the course of this text, but the chronological distance between the respective works remains important. Habermas is unquestionably significant, and the processes by which such theorists reach judgement, and the academic environment within which they produce work are more recognisable and conducive to scholarly consideration. However, if artists (visual, literary or performing) create works that precede, or prompt discourse that affects the political sphere, is it not critical that they too, be considered?

2.1 Kiefer and the shaping of *Historie/Geschichte*

For Anselm Kiefer, in 1973, there was a *space* where unified German nationhood (then shattered by the divisive forces of ideological imperialism[335]) was once nurtured. Driven by the notion that a purging of cultural identity would cleanse Germany of the disease that was Nazism, more spaces appeared; spaces once occupied by Germany's cultural,

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331 Thierry de Duve. *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1996) p. 284.

332 As a representative cross-section of the visual artists engaged with *Vergangenheitsbewaltigung*, I could recommend viewing the works (contemporary to Kiefer's) of A.R. Penck, Jorg Immendorff, Wolff Vostell, Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke

333 The most poignant manifestation of this division was then U S. President Ronald Reagan's visit to Kolmeshöhe Cemetery, Bitburg in West Germany with then-Chancellor Helmut Kohl on May 5, 1985. This became the centrepiece to the ideological debates concerning history, memory and reconciliation that were referred to as the *Historikerstreit.* For further details, see Richard J. Jensen *Reagan at Bergen-Belsen and Bitburg* (Galveston, Texas· A & M University Press, 2008) or Bernard Weinraub's article "Reagan Joins Kohl in Brief Memorial at Bitburg Graves" *The New York Times* (May 6, 1985)

334 John Torpey proposes: "Nolte's...article in the German weekly Die Zeit ["Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will," June 6, 1986] may be regarded as the opening salvo in the *Historikerstreit*" in "Introduction: Habermas and the Historians" *New German Critique* (Volume 44, Special Issue on the *Historikerstreit*, 1988) p 9

335 I refer here to the division of Germany into the liberal democratic West and the socialist East

spiritual and political forefathers. Otto von Bismarck, Richard Wagner, Friedrich Nietszche, Caspar David Friedrich, Martin Heidegger; all (most posthumously) tarred by Nazism's ideological brush. Despite the industrious will of Germany's post-war polity, these spaces remained. As a citizen of the West German state, Kiefer's freedom to explore this space was facilitated by the foundation of democratic governance and political liberalism.[336] Ironically, the results of Kiefer's explorations (particularly his earlier works) were decried by critic and non-critic alike for breaching 'cultural taboo.'

Increasingly – particularly in the last 10 years – Kiefer is being institutionally recognised within Germany as an important contributor to the reckoning of Germany's past. Perhaps the most poignant signalling of the heightened presence *the visual* has in the contemplation of this past was Kiefer being awarded the 2008 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade:

> This is the first time it is being awarded to someone who is not a 'man of letters'. In autumn the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade will go to Anselm Kiefer, 63, a painter, sculptor, object artist, the great and reticent loner of German art. Anselm Kiefer is certainly not one for the chatter at *vernissages*, the heated excitement of the big Art Fairs or the self-satisfied attitude of a 'prince of painters'. Kiefer is a thinker, a reader, a serious prospector of the depths of history, in particular German history...Kiefer, who was born towards the end of the Second World War, brings to light the "sedimentations of history" through his art – the artist as excavator.[337]

Here, Kiefer, the 'artist as excavator,' becomes (like Adorno, Habermas and countless others[338]) a proponent of critical historicism. In the heady, early days of German economic rationalism, industrial and economic growth deemed any such challenge the work of doomsayers, and passionately opposed. In many ways mirroring the Frankfurt School's shifting perspective, Kiefer has adapted and reconsidered his work while remaining true to certain core ideals. It is, among many qualities, Kiefer's commitment in

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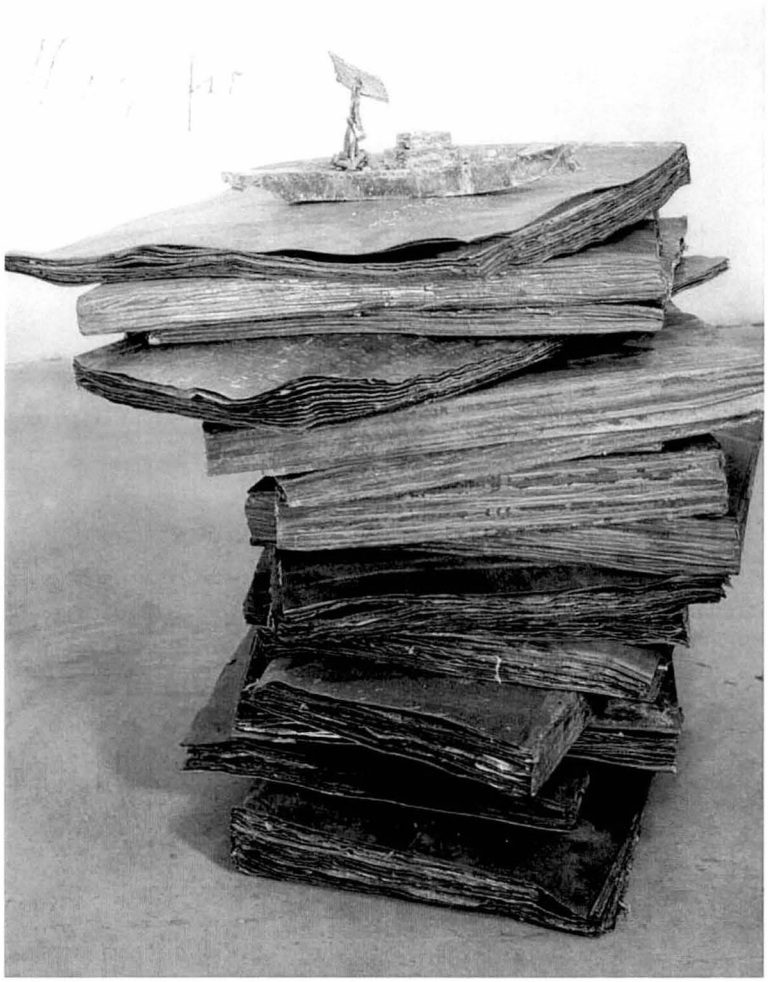
[336] The communist East was styling an erasure in the mould shared by its fellow Eastern-bloc states Based on the rationally argued (but highly questionable) position of ideological superiority and victory and backed-up by the usual hardline stance on dissent, the East eliminated political and aesthetic diversity as successfully as had the Nazis. For further detail: Thomas H. Fox *Stated Memory: East Germany and the Holocaust* (Rochester, New York. Camden House, 1999) or Mary Fullbrook *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999)

[337] Jana Schultz. "Anselm Kiefer: Peace Prize for a Profound Artist" *Deutschland Online* (http://www.magazine-deutschland de/en/culture/arts/article/nbp/19/article/der-tiefgruendige.html) Accessed 21·32, October 30, 2008

[338] That is, the revision of historiography extended beyond Germany. Michel Foucault is one noteworthy example. See his opening salvo in *Archaeology of Knowledge*: "...workers in the historical field [have distinguished] various sedimentary strata." Michel Foucault. *Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972) p. 1

defiance of trend that appealed to the Peace Prize judges:

> ...the association and its members have chosen to honor an artist of global importance who has consistently sought to confront us with a disturbing moral message of that which is ruinous and volatile...The incredibly strong resonance that Kiefer's work has received results from his ability to create a visual vocabulary for both timeless and acute themes and thereby simultaneously transform the viewer into a reader. The extent to which Kiefer deals with literature and poetry is demonstrated not only by his installations, which constantly allude to great works. Kiefer also made the book itself – the book as a form – into a decisive vehicle of expression. His monumental lead works appear as shields against a defeatism that dares to deny a future to books and reading.[339]



(Fig. 27) Anselm Kiefer. *Naglfar* (1998) Soldered lead and mixed media on treated lead mounted on wood. 300 cm x 190 cm. Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna

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[339] Author not credited. Text taken from The German Publishers' and Booksellers' Association 2008 Peace Prize website: *Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchandels* (http://www.boersenverein.de/de/112141?pid=199913) Accessed 21:32, October 30, 2008.

That Kiefer actually creates massive lead sculptural representations of books (Fig. 27) is perhaps his own monument to the transmission of ideas. However one might interpret such works, we can begin to register the significance of understanding how this work as at the crucible of a renewed rendering of *concept* and *form.*

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As one of the key figures in the *Historikerstreit*, Habermas summarised the debate with the question: "*In which way* is the Nazi period to be processed in public consciousness?"[340] For Habermas, representation (one might, for the benefit of the thesis, like to consider this as the *formation* of a *concept*) is one of the most critical means by which this 'monstrous past' could be 'processed' and 'healed.' Habermas was greatly concerned by the historical "thought ban"[341] imposed by the dominant neo-conservative forces within West German politics; again, a metaphor implying a site of enforced emptiness or nothingness: *space.* For Habermas, the proper representation of these atrocities was tantamount to progression (*working through*), while the project of historical 'normalisation' symbolised by the Reagan's visit to the Bitburg war memorial, and undertaken by conservative historians, notably Ernst Nolte, Andreas Hillgruber, Klaus Hildebrand and Michael Stürmer, was a threatening reversal of moral responsibility.

Naturally, as a *visual* artist, Kiefer's contribution to the project of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is tied to the immediacy of the image. However Kiefer's works of this period (referred to as the 'Attic paintings'[342]) are among the more challenging representations – visual or textual – because, unlike Beuys (whose *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1963* immediately exudes a melancholic desolation) Kiefer's attic paintings suggest a return to more formal and painterly aesthetic at odds with the conceptual problem of political trauma in Germany. Yet this is precisely Kiefer's ambition; to disguise his project in irony and negative representation – representing that which is not there – thus enticing the viewer into a contemplative cycle. In the key Kiefer text *Fire on the Earth: Anselm Kiefer and the Postmodern World* John C. Gilmour explains:

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[340] op. cit., Habermas "Concerning the Public Use of History" p 40.

[341] ibid., p. 45.

[342] In German, *Dachboden-Bilder.* I have adopted the Anglicised form from Brüderlin p. 36.

> Kiefer...presents us with a space which is at once realistic and abstract. Although the massive beams and the wall framing the space make it appear that we can enter the empty attic room, the painting resists our desire to read it in simple realistic terms...He flaunts his ability to paint in the modernist way by his handling of the woodgrain motif...he demonstrates that he knows the theory of modernism, that he knows how to practice painting within its terms, and that he chooses to go beyond it...[343]

The deliberated ambiguity is an essential feature of the construction of Kiefer's attic, and upon this canvas, this interface, Kiefer works *concept* and *form.*

This brings to attention Kiefer's envisaging of the artists' role. As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, reading Beuys's art is a task bound to the artist and his psyche, for that is, necessarily, the subject of the work. Consequently, one can easily find oneself bound to a psychoanalytical study of his work. This methodology is shaped, in part, by the vast and accessible collection of Beuys's interviews, symposia and lectures, but otherwise, by his own self-mythologisation:

> Joseph Beuys...trafficked in symbols. These were derived from his personal experience as a wrecked airman in World War II...This powerful experience yielded a powerful personal myth, but the symbols of fat and felt manage to express universal feelings of nurture, warmth, healing, care and life. Kiefer's symbols are purely external...Kiefer's work does not have this as its content but as its form: It is empty, stripped of brightness and warmth by an act of showmanly will in order to transmit a sense of false despair.[344]

Anselm Kiefer is one of the more elusive artists; he seldom agrees to interviews and rarely contributes to catalogues. The physical distance Kiefer keeps from his work, and Danto's expressive interpretation, advance the impression that this space, left by Kiefer's absence is – like the absence in the attic of *Notung* – a key representational method in itself. Take, as a means of comparison, some of Kiefer's early works (particularly pre-1970) where he makes a personal appearance in his art – for instance, the pages from his 1969 montage work *Besetzungen* (*Occupations*).

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[343] John C. Gilmour. "Original Representation and Anselm Kiefer's Postmodernism" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Volume 46, no. 3, 1988) p. 342.

[344] Arthur C. Danto. "Anselm Kiefer" *The Nation* (Volume 248, no. 1, 1989) p. 2.

(Fig. 28) Anselm Kiefer. Detail: *Besetzungen* (1969) *interfunktionen*, no. 12 (1975): p.135.

Here Kiefer appears in a number of guises – *faux*-occupier, tragi-fascist, gender-ambiguous *Seig-heil*er – but never as Kiefer:

> The artist seems to have assumed the identity of the conquering National Socialist who occupies Europe…But when one looks again, multiple ironies begin to appear…There just seems no way out of the deeply problematic nature of Kiefer's 'occupations,' this one as well as the ones that

were to follow in the 1970s, paintings that occupied the equally shunned icons and spaces of German national history and myth.[345]

Not all were uncritical of Kiefer's representation; perhaps none moreso than Marcel Broodthaers (who had previously had an ethical falling-out with Beuys[346]). In Christine Mehring's review of the short-lived, but influential German art magazine *interfunktion*, Benjamin Buchloh's recollection of Broodthaers exclamation is aired: "Who's this fascist who thinks he's an antifascist?" With these words Broodthaers voiced his outrage at *Besetzungen (Occupations)*, featured in the 1975 issue of *interfunktionen* (Fig. 28). Kiefer's 1969 project showed the young artist performing the Nazi salute in front of historically significant European monuments and structures, and prompted Broodthaers to withdraw one of his artist's books from publication under *interfunktionen*'s mantle. His reaction effectively severed funding for the next issue, thus sealing the fate of what was, arguably, the most important European art journal since the Second World War. Dealers pulled their advertisements; curators and other artists conveyed their dismay, as did the magazine's founding editor, Friedrich Wolfram (aka Fritz) Heubach. The reaction, recalls Buchloh, "wasn't legendary, it was a scandal."[347] Buchloh, Heubach's successor, commissioned the contribution without a second thought. Although he would become a critic of Kiefer's later work, for Buchloh, the artist's 'occupations' suggested "a real working through of German history. You have to inhabit it to overcome it."[348] While this personalisation and reification of the condition is played out in *Besetzungen (Occupations)*, Kiefer's *un*-inhabited attics are more evocative renderings of a failed *working through*. It is almost certain that intellectual and aesthetic maturation forced the insolent symbolism of Kiefer's 'occupations' to give way to the spatial concerns of 1973's attic paintings. In *Notung*, Kiefer no longer 'inhabits' the work. This shift forms the backdrop to the investigation of altered subjectivity in Kiefer's art and the aesthetic consequences.

John C. Gilmour's reflections on his first encounter with Kiefer's work demonstrate the artist's capacity to almost guide the viewer through the transitory referencing of image to thought:

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[345] Andreas Huyssen. "Anselm Kiefer. The Terror of History, the Temptation of Myth" *October* 48 (Spring, 1989) p. 31.

[346] op. cit , Germers.

[347] Christine Mehring. "Continental Schrift: The Story of Interfunktionen" *Artforum* (Volume 42, no. 9, 2004) p. 178.

[348] ibid.

> Figurative, historical, and textual references were interlarded with otherwise abstract painting, mythic themes competed with aesthetic motifs for the viewer's attention, and fragments of prints, bits of debris, and other foreign elements intruded into what should have been pure painting space.[349]

Gilmour continues by noting how this astuteness has channelled interest in Kiefer beyond art-historical discourse:

> ...Kiefer is a *philosophical painter.* He creates a Socratic engagement with the familiar, undermining our confidence that we know what we are seeing. A painting neither abstract nor realistic, a painting whose references to physical reality and history get undermined by imaginary features, a painting where language intrudes on to the painted surface...as an element in the formal composition: these are only a few of the respects in which Kiefer's painting practice calls for further analysis.[350]

Matthew Biro extends and refines this engagement in his book *Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger*, summarizing and applying Heidegger's work to Kiefer's.[351] However, my intentions herein are to heed Gilmour's call, to focus on a single work, and contribute to the further analysis of Anselm Kiefer's work as a philosophical study.

2.2 The site: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

In the chapter on *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* I noted the growth of interest in museums as an academic concern. I should also reiterate that, due to the limitations of my research, I only skirt the periphery of this discourse. I would nevertheless like to take a moment to consider my personal encounter with *Notung.* Just as the experience of visiting the Block Beuys in the Hessisches Landesmuseum engendered its own, distinct consideration of the relationship between an artwork and its location or environment,

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[349] John C. Gilmour. *Fire on the Earth: Anselm Kiefer and the Postmodern World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990) p. xi.

[350] ibid., p 6.

[351] In a review of Biro's book, it is noted: "One is hard pressed to recall the last time a mere conjunction carried such a burdensome methodological load. The "and" of Biro's title prepares the reader for the compare-and-contrast struggle that is to come, a struggle that points not only to the specific similarities between a philosopher and a painter, but also to the more general exercise of comparing philosophy to painting." Sarah Rich "Review: Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger" *The Art Bulletin* (No 3, September 2000) p. 595.

the visit to the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, in Rotterdam to see *Notung* was noteworthy. Not, sadly, for sharing the kind of reverence the Block Beuys invokes in its pilgrims. Rather, the storage of *Notung* in an innocuous grey-brick room beneath the museum spoke volumes for the vulnerability of Kiefer's work to historical, political and aesthetic fashion. Matthew Biro's generous assessment is perhaps a more constructive interpretation of this condition:

> Kiefer's...works have provoked an extreme range of responses, from profuse and overblown praise to radical, knee-jerk condemnation. The undecidability of the works, in other words, illuminates a broad and divergent range of meanings at every moment of their history, and, by provoking both sent and disagreement, always suggest a multiplicity of possible human identities.[352]

It is also a reflection on the difference between Beuys and Kiefer as public figures: one an obsessive self-mythologiser/promoter, the other a virtual recluse. The function of Kiefer's works within his greater project is very different to that of Beuys. On a purely practical level, without the inextricable connections that bind Beuys's works (usually) to large collections with ample space, Kiefer's simply constructed paintings suit the rotation policies of museums. Nevertheless, the scale and actual construction of Kiefer's work means it is not without its own special curatorial concerns. For example, when in Amsterdam, I was unable to view the extensive Sanders collection – which contains some of Kiefer's most critically acclaimed *and* dissected works – due to construction work for a new Stadtlijk Museum. Some part of the collection was housed at an interim site[353] but Kiefer's work was not on any wall for public viewing. My requests to view their collection were denied for essentially logistical reasons, most prominent the fact that "most of the works are extremely large."[354] I was beginning to house concerns for my choice of Kiefer's work as suitable for this thesis' intent. The lack of interest that followed his work was at odds with my impressions of the increased scholarly interest in his work.

For the last stop on my itinerary I returned to Germany after my time in The

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[352] Mathew Biro. *Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p 5.

[353] My research field work was conducted while the Stadtlijk Museum was temporarily, and only partially, housed at Amsterdam's former Central Post Office building during October, 2004.

[354] This was a critical line of reasoning explained in telephone conversation with unknown member of curatorial staff, July 23, 2004.

Netherlands, to visit the Neues Museum, in Weimar. The relatively modest pace of Weimar belied its political, cultural and historical significance. Yet in these settings I was able to view Kiefer's work in a dedicated museum installation. During one of my visits, I observed a schoolteacher bringing a class of teen-aged students into the large room that housed Kiefer's work. When he began talking about the works there was such a great sense of impassioned urgency that the students appeared genuinely enthralled. The likelihood of such an encounter would have once been unimaginable. "That one finds [Kiefer's] most important work more often in a foreign than in a German museum" wrote critic, Richard Beuth in 1987, "is very meaningful."[355] Critic Jürgen Hohmeyer backed this up with a statistical reading of the situation:

> The international resonance of Kiefer stands in sensational disproportion to the reservation at home. In the list of 37 public collections between Eindhoven and Minneapolis, between London and Sydney, of the owners of Kiefer's work, the Germans do not even comprise one third.[356]

However in observing the teacher and his students, I sensed that as Kiefer's tide receded *outside* Germany, *within* the new, reunified Germany, a new, and very prominent space had been made for Kiefer's work. In my dealings with the Dutch museums, I perceived only the sense that these works were not the representative force they once were for non-German Europeans; that now Germany is seeing, with interest anew in Kiefer, the import of his representation of Germany's past, they can be put away in storage – *for we are done with them now.* In Weimar my spirits were raised by the reception to Kiefer in the context of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung.* To witness students engaged in discussion with their teacher, amidst Kiefer's vast and mournful artworks, was to witness art affecting thought.

After Weimar, my immediate feelings were to study one of the works in the Neues Museum; however, I recalled the impression left upon me by *Notung,* despite the unceremonious viewing. I had taken pages and pages of notes on the work detailing the method and materials; first and lasting impressions; its aesthetic qualities and their contribution to the greater project; the curator's thoughts and observations – even

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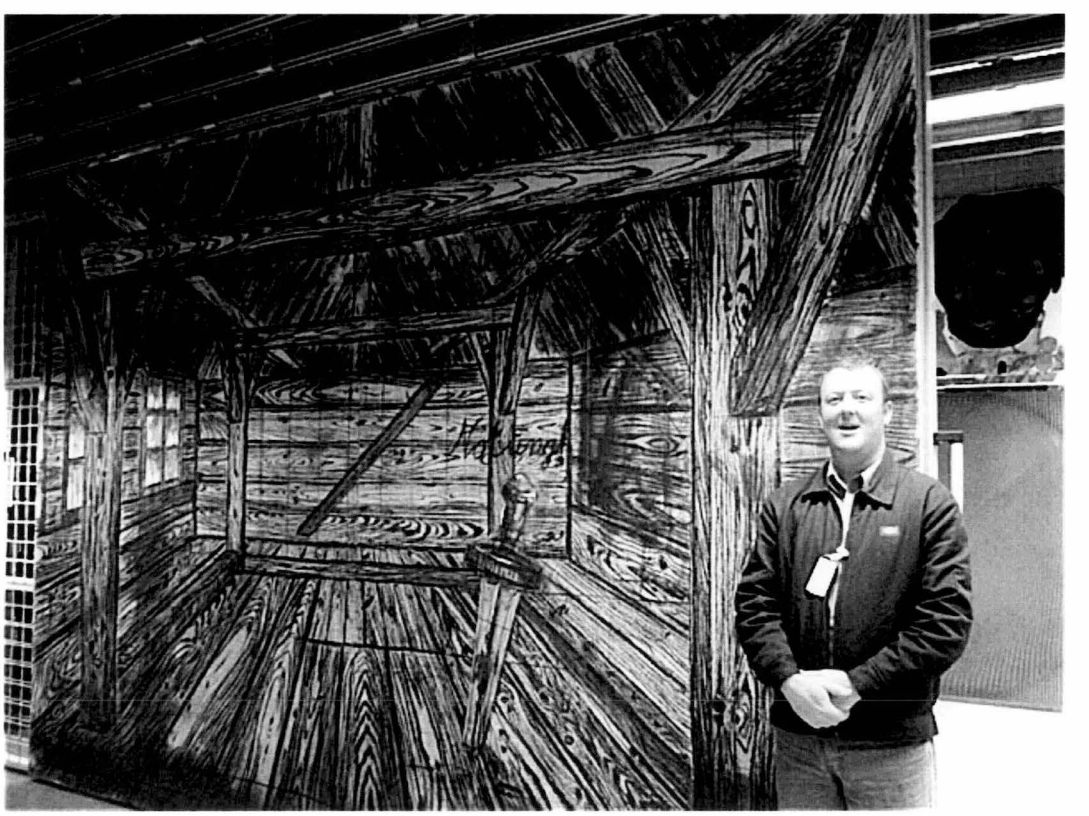
[355] Richard Beuth. "Weg ohne Wiederkehr in Siberiens Totenhauser: Vehement gegen den Geschichtsverlust anmalen: Amerikanische Museen zeigen den Werk von Anselm Kiefer" *Die Welt* (No. 292, December 17, 1987). op cit., Saltzman. p. 120.

[356] Jurgen Hohmeyer. "Bleigwicht fur die Ordnung der Engel" *Der Spiegel* (Volume 41, no 2, January 5, 1987) ibid., Saltzmann.

detailing the unanticipated satisfaction I gained from being able to inspect the reverse of the canvas and the construction of the stretcher. Indeed, the experience is significant for allowing the reader into another realm of viewing art, *outside* the normative location of gallery or museum walls. For this same reason, it could be argued that Kiefer's montage or 'book' works proffered conformity. The crudely scrap-booked collection of images brings Kiefer face-to-face with Beuys's aesthetic neuroses and perpetrator-complex, shares Darboven's orderliness in pagination, and aligns his work with the question concerning the relationship between the visual and the textual. However, virtually all of Kiefer's work marks Germany's mourning (*working through*) in some manner, and I found that this period of Kiefer's work represented a successful union of aesthetic and intellectual creativity at a level of sophistication lacking in the explicit brutishness of his montage. Furthermore, of all the works I viewed, *Notung* was, quite simply, the most visually impacting. With dimensions of 300 x 432 centimetres, the viewer is immediately impressed by the similarity *Notung* has to a theatrical backdrop (Fig. 28).



(Fig. 28) The author standing with *Notung*. This perspective shows the work in the conditions of storage, and illustrates the scale of the work in relation to the viewer. Photograph by Jacqueline Rapmund. Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam. October 24, 2004.

Moreover, what is essentially most unsettling about *Notung* (particularly when viewed in scale) is what Gilmour describes as a "mixing [of the] modes of representation...interfering with our desire to unify the scene into a coherent totality."[357] Few who view the works from this period escape the unique impact of the scale in unison with the style of representation:

> [What is] immediately striking about the wooden-interior series is the large size of the works. In comparison to the earlier paintings and watercolours, the wooden-interior canvases are much bigger and, therefore, far more assertive and aggressive. Furthermore, these paintings make use of a pronounced linear perspective scheme that emphasizes both their banal representational character and their abstract qualities. On the one hand, the viewer can clearly see what the paintings are supposed to represent. The architectural structure of the interior is amply, if schematically depicted. In addition the wood-grain pattern, which appears pervasively on the walls, floors, doors and ceilings, initially appears to be an indexical representation, since it recalls...imprints taken from real-world sources.[358]

In the following sections I will explicate the construction of this vision, and in so doing respect the *totality* of Kiefer's monumental representation of the generational metamorphosis of Germany's trauma. In keeping with the method used in the reading of *Auschwitz Demonstration, 1956-1964*, I will explicate *Notung* in 'elements.' For a number of readily apparent reasons, particularly in media and dimension, the two works require specific and distinct categorisation. Nevertheless, by considering these 'elements' in *Notung* the reader may gain greater insight into the intricate totality of this otherwise simple representation. Unlike *Auschwitz Demonstration, 1956-1964*, however, *Notung* will be broken into three referential elements. First, I will examine the attic (the *space*), and the historical and theoretical backdrop to Kiefer's interest in its 'construction.' This dissection will lead into an investigation into Kiefer's ability to evoke ambiguous subjectivity. Finally, I will examine the ironic and monumental presence of the sword – *Notung*. This visual reference to Richard Wagner's *Die Ring des Nibelungen* evokes Germany's troubled cultural heritage. In this evocation Kiefer 'reactivates' Wagner's tabooed cultural patronage, bringing to the fore questions concerning the very tangled 'historical milieu' Habermas speaks of. However Kiefer's aesthetic is never bound by simple symbolism, thus necessitating detailed reference to the background to the

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[357] op. cit., Gilmour. *Fire on the Earth: Anselm Kiefer and the Postmodern World* p. 19.

[358] op. cit., Biro. *Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* p. 33.

particular scene in Wagner's opera from whence *Notung* is drawn.

2.3 The work: *Notung*

> ...the current dispute is not concerned with the "indebted memory," but with the more narcissistic question of how we are to relate to our own traditions for our own sake. If that does not succeed without recourse to illusions, then the memorial to the victims also becomes a farce.
>
> - Jürgen Habermas, *Concerning the Public Use of History*

> The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appears.
>
> - Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*

The aesthetic tension generated by the Wagnerian dramatics of the oversized and bloodied sword – *Notung* – impaled improbably in the floor of this empty German attic, is characteristic of Anselm Kiefer's work. On first impressions, *Notung* is an anomaly in this thesis; its creation and construction is somewhat 'traditional' in the sense that is a painting on canvas. However, incorporating *Notung*'s more familiarly perceived creation and construction strengthens the thesis' claims by opening its application to include two-dimensional works of art. I acknowledge that a single case study is not conclusive. Nevertheless, I believe it is important to present such an example so as to avert the reader's concerns regarding the specificity of this thesis' claims. In the previous section I outlined how and why *Notung* stood out as significant for its simple yet sophisticated representation of Germany's cultural and ideological spaces. The plural – *spaces* – refers to the multiple 'erasures' that occurred in Germany after the Second World War.

A critical methodological difference between the analysis of Beuys's work in the previous chapter, and Kiefer's work, here, is the obvious distinction between three-dimensional and two-dimensional work. Naturally, this affects a subjective and perceptive difference; while the viewer may wend her or his way through the Block Beuys in infinite mutable trajectories, the viewer, standing before *Notung*, is essentially bound to the perspective proffered by its construction as a two-dimensional work. This remains true of any painting (as understood in the traditional sense) when hung on a wall. What further distinguishes Kiefer's painting from Beuys's installation is the minimalism of the imagery. By this I do not mean the variously understood style, genre or 'school' of *Minimalism*, but rather the visual simplicity of representation Kiefer

presents. This naturally affects my approach to writing about the work, but does not limit it. Indeed, the simplicity of Kiefer's symbolism belies the complexity of his project.

Thus, while *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* lent itself to dissection by elemental construction, *Notung* requires a more unitary and encompassing approach. In this section, I will extract from the work the referential features and build an understanding of the cultural, historical and philosophical matters that underpin Kiefer's greater project. Thus I will proceed with my explication of the three, key features of the work – two *within* the image and one *of* the image. I will do this by considering *the attic* as object, its aesthetic as referent to the subject, before looking at the symbolism of *Notung* – the sword. In this abbreviated form, my intentions appear simple. However, as the philosophical backdrop to these matters will illustrate, these features are bound to a complex conceptual framework, made moreso in the context of Germany's post-war condition.

2.3.1 The attic as representation of Germany's cultural and ideological *space*

> Anselm Kiefer's *oeuvre* revolves around metamorphosis and, moreover, space as quintessentially postmodern categories, which stand for the coexistence of opposites, newness, and paradigm change.[359]

I would like to start by very simply explicating the formal 'construction' of the representation in question. Though this method is intended as a guide, I hope, on closing, that the reader will have, to some degree, developed her or his own appreciation of the work. Describing the image from a first-hand perspective will contribute to the reader's interpretation by detailing the more subtle features of the work that fail to be transmitted via reproduction. It should also act as a reminder that reproductions of paintings, though mostly adequate for such readings, are an inferior source of reference. However this not need be an exclusive reading; as this thesis progresses I will continue to consider the variable conditions for viewing, and the viewer's subsequent, personal experience as integral to the interpretation. Moreover, any such generalisations are debatable, as the media now available to practicing artists (and the viewers of their works) extend beyond the traditions of formal painting and sculpture, thus reshaping the

[359] Nicole Fugmann. "The Gestalt Change of Postmodern Critique: Anselm Kiefer's Spatial Historiography" *New German Critique* (Volume 75, no. 6, 1998) p. 90

question of reproduction.

Nevertheless, in the reproduction of *Notung* the viewer can see that the attic Kiefer has created in his earthily formal style is clearly of sturdy construct. However, standing before the original, Kiefer's rendering of the wood-grain in the beams is overdone to the extent that when combined with the perspectival force, the whole image is dizzying when viewed in full-scale. Closer inspection reveals the frailty of brush-stroke, pen-mark and charcoal-rub that gives the image a chimeraic quality. This intricate interplay of force and fragility is of great aesthetic significance. The deliberated construction is a clear break with the Beuysian aesthetic tradition, and also represents a political shift. The dizzying planes and aggressive perspective bring this space to life, imbuing it with a history within its very construction. That is; the apparent roughness with which the timber has been hewn suggests the rudimentary (but nevertheless sufficient) construction of rural architecture. The intensity of the grain suggests rawness in the timber, which might be construed as evidence of a surrounding wooded area. Kiefer's personal, historical and aesthetic interest in Germany's wooded landscape is (from observing many of his works of the 1970s) clear and oft cited.[360]

The forest is central to Germany's mythology and folklore; a landscape within which the ideological romanticism of political forces as diverse as Nazism and ecologism find their most powerful symbols. In *Landscape and Memory*, Simon Schama considers Kiefer's work in this context, noting the "long tradition that imagined the forests as the primal birthplace of nations; the beginnings of habitation" and that the immortality of the nation is assured by the continued health of their forests.[361] Schama also claims the 'subliminal awareness' of the special nature of the forest in German culture had its inception in the Roman era, with the thwarted attempts at subjugation of the Germanic tribes of the time – most famously the defeat and decimation of the army of Varus at the Teutoberg Forest in 9CE by Arminius (itself the subject of a number of Kiefer's works immediately following the attic paintings, notably 1976's *Varus* and 1978's *Ways of Wordly Wisdom - Arminius' Battle* [Fig. 30]) – marking the birthplace of a united German culture. That Kiefer has crafted this almost psychedelic setting from the timber of *the forest* simultaneously imbues the space with both the intoxicating essence of this *Blut und Boden*

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[360] Kiefer grew up in the Black Forest region, and during the production of the 'Attic paintings' had a studio in the area. For further detail see: Ernst van Alphen *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997) and Simon Schama *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage, 1996).

[361] ibid., Schama. p. 115.

nationalism, and its subsequent erasure from post-war German political culture.

The chronological/historical ambiguity of this representation is significant in the reading of Kiefer. The attic is pre-modern but essentially timeless, or historically un-locatable. Further sensation of historical and spatial un-locatability is manifest in the ghostly beams – projecting from the left and right anterior of the painting to the centre – while the assemblage/collage effect Kiefer has used brings unused lines and poorly executed erasures. Is this a past erased space? Or a future space forming? Why does Kiefer insist on such an intense and multi-layered representation of the textural forming of what is ultimately a reference to space? After all, many artists have forged a spatial aesthetic with a more minimal and ethereal representation; consider Mark Rothko or Barnett Newman. It returns to the matter of representation. While Rothko and Newman explore questions of spirit and religiosity, Kiefer's space must necessarily be forged by a construct (albeit taboo) of political and aesthetic realism. Thus there is an ironic, but necessary, extremism in Kiefer's aesthetic. Nicole Fugmann goes so far as to state that "one of Kiefer's leitmotivs is a critical scorching of space."[362] What role does the attic play in this 'critical scorching'? The attic is the construction housing the space. Attics are invariably places of storage; sites where one is immediately transported to visions of dusty crates and cobwebbed chests within which remnants of the past lie, awaiting discovery. And then there is the great irony of this particular attic, void of any such tender remnants or measure of time; in this space only the brutal Wagnerian symbolism remains.

What does this representation mean for the reader of philosophy, and what does this representation offer that text does – or *can* – not? To answer the last question first, I refer back to Pierre Nora's description of the inconsistency between historical and memorial representation. Kiefer is able to represent this problematic relationship of historical and memorial by using the immediacy of visual representations to contrast the irony and ambiguity of Germany's dealings with its past in ways that texts – particularly conventional historical texts – cannot. *Notung* cannot clear up long-sustained arguments concerning statistical or evidential matters of historical concern. It can however, transport the viewer to the site of Germany's denial, and illustrate such significant matters with expediency. Taking the time and effort to absorb the unique contribution art makes to the discourse surrounding *the German Question*, means that – like Habermas,

[362] op. cit., Fugmann. p. 101.

and like the students in the Neues Museum in Weimar – the viewer asks herself or himself these questions about how the past should be remembered. Any viewer prepared to engage in this discourse will find that when presented with this space (particularly at this scale), there is no escaping these questions.

Untangling the cultural and historical milieu that binds the symbolism of Kiefer's work emphasises the complexity of his project. However, as simple representative forms (albeit forms whose simplicity belies the critical depth of their master's intent) they are, first and foremost, precisely that: symbols. In *Notung*, as we are simultaneously confronted by both the attic and the sword, we respond to these, immediately, as such.

2.3.2 The attic as representation of the question of subjectivity

This aspect of *Notung* is, perhaps, its most powerful, and all the more striking for its subliminal presence. It is not an aspect that can necessarily be isolated for the viewer, because it is not visible – yet is critical to its construction. It is the aesthetic qualities of Kiefer's attic lead the viewer to question the notion of subjectivity. In its purest sense, this is a question of technique, evident in the 'construction' of the attic in its painted form. However, for it to succeed in bringing forth questions of subjectivity is no mean feat; since the seed of the modern consideration of the subject/object relationship was sown with the Cartesian dictum *cogito ergo sum*, the complex nature of the subject/object relationship in philosophy has come to be elemental to metaphysics. Fewer notions elicit such a range of categorisations, from bedazzling complexity to overt simplicity.

In this section I will outline why, from Hegel to Habermas, the relationship between subject and object becomes a critical question, simultaneously developing the sub-thesis that a work of art possesses qualities that permit the conflation of concept. Or, alternatively, that art has representative and aesthetic qualities that can, at least initially, circumvent the complexities of this discourse and present a 'momentary solution.' By way of this visual representative trigger, these works might become more accessible and forge new engagement when, as previously stated, these two forms – philosophy and art – find a harmonious and complementary condition within which to work.

It might be argued that the technical and stylistic features exhibited in *Notung* are more relative to questions of perception. However, I would contend that the notion of the subject is, in these conditions, *formed* by visual perception. Kiefer's 'attic paintings' have

particular aesthetic qualities that critically alter perception. These qualities, forged by the artist, then allow for subjective engagement with the historical and cultural meaning of *the attic*, forging multiple indicators for subjective contemplation. Kiefer acknowledges this deliberate scheming:

> I am consciously deploying space [*Ich denke sehr im Raum*]...Two axes of time correspond: the small, individual human time and gargantuan cosmic time. This can be defined as an osmotic relationship with the canvas functioning as a membrane.[363]

Thus, the 'attic paintings' raise questions of subjectivity, and almost all are titled with significant cultural (almost exclusively Wagnerian) reference. Again, here, we are witness to Kiefer's own thoughts concerning this deployment:

> Am I a fascist? That's very important. You cannot answer so quickly. Authority, competition, superiority...these are facets of me like everyone else. You have to choose the right way. To say I'm one thing or another is too simple. I wanted to paint the experience and then answer [364]

A number of examples are scattered across the continents, with examples like *Parsifal II* and *Parsifal III* (Fig. 30) in London's Tate Modern, *Wooden Room* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (Fig. 31), and, of course, *Notung* in the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen.

Though predominantly painted in oils, the works also incorporate charcoal and/or the artist's own blood. Blood (*Blut*) is an incredibly powerful medium for its corporeal and subjective symbolism in the conceptualisation of nationhood and place. Charcoal also becomes a symbolically laden medium if considered literally, in its form as scorched, blackened wood. It might be read as a reference to the destruction of the German forests (by extension, *Boden*), with Kiefer's use of these scorched remains as tools in the creative process inverting the loss. If it is more broadly representative of the destructive forces of Nazism, the use of burnt material could also have trans-substantive qualities. Though the details of media are often overlooked, there is no such discretion in Kiefer's rendering of the perspective in the three aforementioned works, and what they demand of the viewer.

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[363] Anselm Kiefer in interview with Hecht op. cit., Fugmann p. 100.

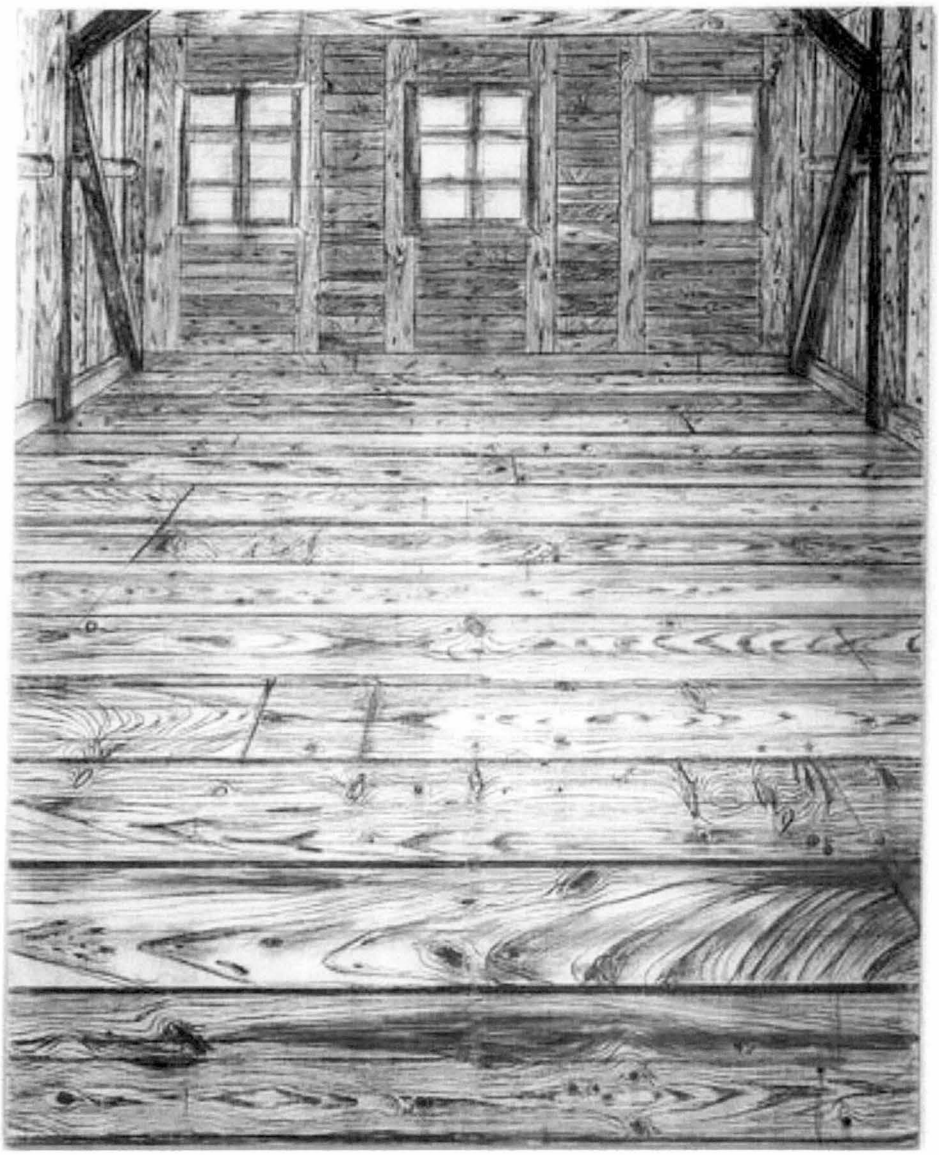
[364] Quoted in Steven Henry Madoff "Anselm Kiefer: A Call to Memory" *Art News* (Volume 86, no. 8, October, 1987) p 129.

The perspectival shifts imply ulterior subjectivity, however Kiefer becomes cryptic when questions arise concerning his own engagement with the work: "The painting which I am creating becomes the other person who approaches me by posing a question." [365] How this affects the question of subjectivity will become evident, although it should be noted that Kiefer does give us a clue: "I respond by incorporating texts or fragments of writing into my canvases."[366]

(Fig. 30) Anselm Kiefer. *Parsifal III* (1973) Oil and blood on paper on canvas.
300.7 x 434.5 cm. Tate Collection, London.

[365] op. cit., Fugmann. p. 105.

[366] ibid.



(Fig. 31) Anselm Kiefer. *Wooden Room* (1972) Charcoal and oil on burlap.
299.7 x 219.7 cm. Museum Of Modern Art, New York.

This confirms the role of text in Kiefer's paintings, and is his point of engagement with the subject-object relationship, and the significance of this relationship in the contemplation of Germany's social, cultural and political trauma. In *Notung*, the vision of Kiefer – as object – as seen in *Besetzungen* (*Occupations*) has been replaced by a voyeuristic subjectivity. From the previous statement it appears that Kiefer claims this subjectivity – at once disarming and engaging – as his own, but once removed from the conditions of production, does it become one's own, one shared, or as one's self in another's skin? Perhaps we might consider this an aesthetic pre-empting of Habermasian intersubjectivity as a critical feature of the communicative (representation/interpretation)

process. As a prelude to this reading, I will present an abbreviated overview of subjectivity in German philosophy, sufficient only to highlight the claims this thesis makes concerning the relationship between *concept* and *form*; for the turn to object-centred philosophy, initiated by Hegel, and its dominance of German philosophy (until the revision of this, and the return to 'subject-centred reason') explains the position undertaken by Kiefer regarding this question.

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The challenge to Cartesian subjectivism was sown in the now familiar antagonism between Kant and Hegel:

> That Hegel was opposed to Kant's doctrine of the thing-in-itself and his consequent limitation of human knowledge to the sphere of *Erscheinung* is well known and has often been repeated. The limitation in question forms the basis of Hegel's repeated charge of 'subjectivism' and his claim that, for Kant, knowledge fails to include the things of the world. Hegel was, in this regard, a thoroughgoing realist: what we know is the things themselves, their properties, unities and relations. For Hegel, the real is not 'behind' or 'beyond,' but actually present in what we apprehend. From this essentially Aristotelian vantage point, Hegel declared Kant's domain of *Erscheinung* insubstantial and subjective. [367]

Hegel questions the Cartesian and Kantian identification of the subjective condition as the only condition for knowing. Though an oversimplification, this undoing of Descartes' object/subject distinction (by way of critique of Kant's *Erscheinung*[368]) illustrates the steps made in philosophical consideration of this matter of subjectivity, and an historical construction of the conditions that brought Kiefer to engage with the matter as a painter. If we can start to piece together the earlier, primitively constructed dichotomy of the subject and the object, we might start to understand the more complex developments, for with this understanding comes insight into the significance of Kiefer's

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[367] John E Smith "Hegel's Critique of Kant" *The Review of Metaphysics* (Volume 26, No. 3, March, 1973) pp 448-449

[368] "That Hegel was opposed to Kant's doctrine of the thing-in itself and his consequent limitation of human knowledge to the sphere of *Erscheinung* is well known and has often been repeated. The limitation in question forms the basis of Hegel's repeated charge of 'subjectivism' and his claim that, for Kant, knowledge fails to include the things of the world. Hegel was, in this regard, a thorough-going realist: what we know is the things themselves, their properties, unities and relations. For Hegel, the real is not 'behind' or 'beyond,' but actually present in what we apprehend. From this essentially Aristotelian vantage point, Hegel declared Kant's domain of *Erscheinung* insubstantial and subjective" ibid

aesthetic and conceptual creation. Kiefer's work is burdened by the post-war German condition, and the question of subjectivity elicits a response that simply cannot be bound to simple dichotomous structures of subjectivity. It is with this in mind that one might consider the Nietzschean developments that came to inform both Heidegger and Adorno. Indeed, Adorno stated that "of all the so-called great philosophers, I owe [Nietzsche] by far the greatest debt – more even than to Hegel."[369] I will come the works of Adorno and Habermas as relative to *Notung* shortly, however, for this particular reading, the historical explication of how subjectivity has come to inform Kiefer continues. Nietzsche follows Hegel's break with the inherent positivism of the discourse with typical disdain:

> There are still harmless self-observers who believe 'immediate certainties' exist, for example 'I think'...But I shall reiterate a hundred times that 'immediate certainty', like 'absolute knowledge' and 'thing in itself', contains a *contradictio in adjecto*: we really ought to get free from the seduction of words!...when I analyse the event expressed in the sentence 'I think', I acquire a series of rash assertions which are difficult, perhaps impossible, to prove – for example, that it is *I* who think, that it has to be something at all that thinks, that thinking is an activity and operation on the part of an entity thought of as a cause, that an 'I' exists, finally that what is designated by 'thinking' has already been determined – that I *know* what thinking is.[370]

This passage certainly resonates with concerns regarding what constitutes 'thinking' and how it becomes manifest (even possessing a certain affinity with Joseph Beuys's antagonistic statement/title, *Ich denke sowieso mit dem Knie*[371]), however the significance of this passage as relative to Kiefer's employment of subjectivity as a driving aesthetic and creative force is in Nietzsche's further deviance from tradition with this exchange:

> I shall never tire of underlining a concise little fact which these superstitious people are loath to admit – namely, that a thought comes when 'it' wants, not when 'I' want; so that is a *falsification* of the facts to say: the subject 'I' is the condition of the predicate 'think'. *It* thinks: but that this 'it' is precisely that famous old 'I' is, to put it mildly, only an assumption, an assertion, above all not an 'immediate certainty'. For even when this 'it thinks' one has already gone too far: this 'it' already contains an *interpretation* of the event and does not belong to the event itself The inference here is in accordance with the habit of grammar: 'thinking is an activity, to every activity pertains one

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[369] Theodor Adorno. *Problems of Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge. Polity, 2000) p. 172.

[370] Friedrich Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil* (London: Penguin Books, 1990) p 46.

[371] This statement (translated "I think, anyway, with my knee") became a catchphrase and the subject of an edition of multiples created by Beuys in 1977.

who acts, consequently ' It was more or less in accordance with the same scheme that the older atomism sought, in addition to the 'force' which acts, that little lump of matter in which it resides, out of which it acts, the atom; more rigorous minds at last learned to get along without this 'residuum of earth', and perhaps we and the logicians as well will one day accustom ourselves to getting along without that little 'it' (which is what the honest old 'I' has evaporated into).[372]

Though not in the same league of opacity as Hegel, Nietzsche's dizzying language nevertheless disguises the construction of an inter-relative position whereby the distinction between subject and object ('I' and 'it') becomes transparent, if not absent. This folds neatly into Nietzsche's view of art:

Art must be viewed as the creative production of the artist (not in terms of the purely receptive/reactive aesthetics of enjoyment) who participates in the life-enhancing will to power at work everywhere in the fundamentally creative cosmos and who therefore struggles against the life-negation of moralists and metaphysicians - whose atavistic 'truth' is no more than a symptom of decadence, *ressentiment*, and impotence to power. Yet his struggle against these others must be by way of indirection, since the artist's creative life must be ruled by a yes-saying response to the chaos of Becoming. This yes-saying response is productive frenzy, and it constitutes 'the grand style.' The achievement of art in the grand style shatters the subject-object relation, fusing worker and work. It is the artist's self-production.[373]

The pre-eminence of Nietzsche's philosophy of art remained, until Heidegger, some fifty years later, faulted his "analyses of 'aesthetic behaviour' especially when they...exert a centrifugal force on reflection on the matrix of the artist and the art work."[374] From this position Heidegger presents his circular relationship in "The Origin of the Work of Art." This is a critical juncture, and one I will return to shortly, however, in order to remind the reader of the historical trajectory of the thought surrounding the relationship between subject and object, I will trace a line from Heidegger back to Descartes – using Heidegger's own words – to see how far we have come in this explication:

The whole of modern metaphysics taken together, Nietzsche included, maintains itself within the interpretation of what it is to be and of truth was prepared by Descartes...The essence of the modern age can be seen in the fact that man frees himself from the bonds of the Middle Ages in freeing himself to himself. But this correct characterization remains, nevertheless,

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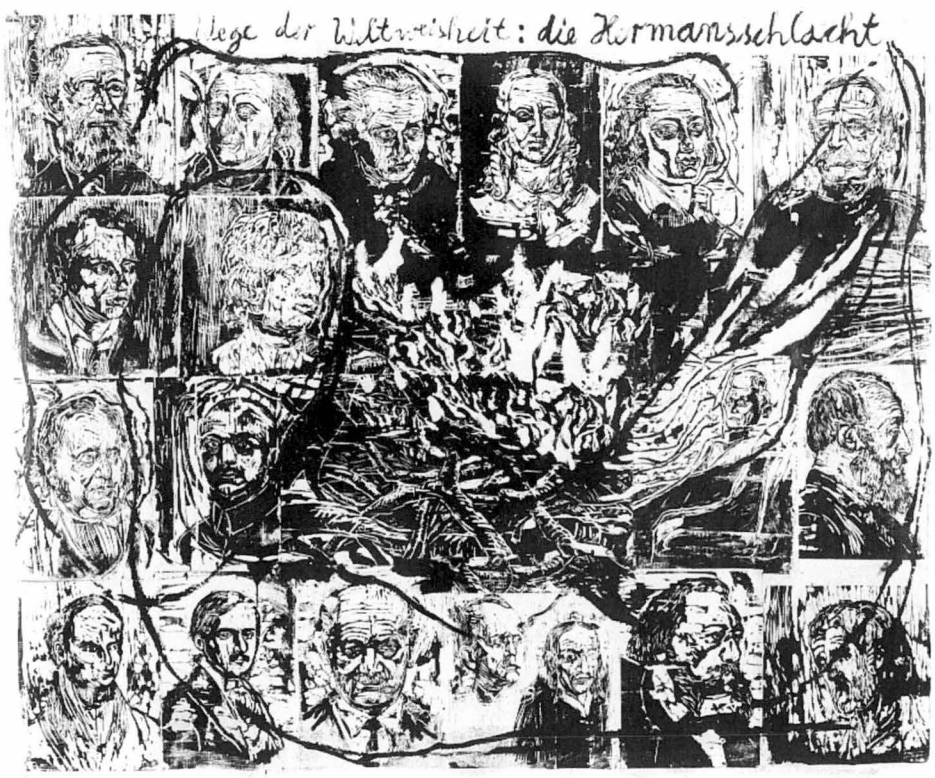
[372] op cit., Nietzsche *Beyond Good and Evil* p. 47.

[373] David Farrell Krell. "Art and Truth in Raging Discord Heidegger and Nietzsche on the Will to Power" *Boundary* (Volume 4, no 2, Special Edition on Martin Heidegger and Literature, Winter, 1976) p. 381.

[374] ibid.

> superficial...Certainly the modern age has, as a consequence of the liberation of man, introduced subjectivism and individualism. But it remains just as certain that no age before this one has produced a comparable objectivism and that in no age before this has the non-individual, in the form of the collective, come to acceptance as having worth. Essential here is the necessary interplay between subjectivism and objectivism. It is precisely this reciprocal conditioning of one by the other that points back to events more profound.[375]

Over and over again, in Hegel, Nietzsche, and now Heidegger, we are witness to the historical outlining of this problem and the conditions within which we exist as significant in determining the essence of the subject. "The Origin of the Work of Art" remains Heidegger's most succinct rendering of the relationship between the artist and the work of art, and is the position from whence this thesis posits theories of subjectivity as developed by Adorno and Habermas in the latter half of the twentieth century. It is from this point that I then consider Kiefer's representation as both formed and departing.



(Fig. 32) Anselm Kiefer. *Wege der Weltwiesheit: die Hermannsschlacht* (1978)
Woodcut collage. Sonnabend Gallery, New York

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[375] Martin Heidegger. "The Age of the World Picture" *The Question Concerning Technology, and other essays* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1977) p. 127.

(Fig. 33) Anselm Kiefer. (detail) *Wege der Weltweisheit: die Hermannsschlacht* (1978)

In light of Matthew Biro's comprehensive monograph detailing the relationship between Heidegger and Kiefer, I need only touch on aspects of the relationship relevant herein. Indeed, only the surprising brevity of Biro's reference to "The Origin of the Work of Art" has determined this expanded reference to the subject/object relationship in art as perceived by Heidegger. Furthermore, Kiefer's portrayal of Heidegger, notably in the series of works titled *Wege der Weltweisheit* (*The Ways of Worldy Wisdom*) (Figs. 32 and 33) painted between 1978 and 1980, and his efforts "to dissuade his interpreters from connecting his works too closely with those of Heidegger,"[376] has provoked curiosity. Clearly, Kiefer does not dissuade Biro. However, irrespective of whose work Kiefer might feel an affinity with, art and philosophy need not be 'connected' in the way Kiefer fears. Of course, his concern for how "these thinkers, who seem so intellectually right and perceptive, come to such socially stupid and commonplace positions"[377] explains his reservations. In support of this thesis' claims, it is only in the relationship between the

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[376] op. cit., Biro. *Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* p. 6.

[377] ibid.

artist and her or his work, and the trinity then formed with the viewer that Heidegger's work is 'connected' to Kiefer's.

(Fig. 34) Vincent van Gogh *A Pair of Shoes* (1886) Oil on canvas. 37.5 x 45 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

As an exercise, I propose reading the following excerpt from "The Origin of the Work of Art" while transposing Heidegger's rendering of the *Lebenswelt* (life-world) – presented here in Van Gogh's painting of peasant shoes (Fig. 34) – to a reading of a *Lebenswelt* present in Kiefer's rendering of the attic:

> From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls, In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the impending childbed and shivering at

> the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the *earth*, and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-within-itself.[378]

This exercise is useful for illustrating how the vision Heidegger elicits from Van Gogh's *Shoes* is not so simply achieved with *Notung*. The ninety-odd years that separate the works of art is evident less in the object represented than in the understanding we have of the subject as relative to their creation and interpretation. The prevailing sense of ambiguity in *Notung* is in the interplay between an unknown observer, and the unknowable object (the attic). The 'meaning' of Kiefer's attic can only be activated by the engaged subject, complicating the Heideggerian thesis somewhat. This ambiguity is not present in van Gogh's shoes. A re-configuration of the dynamic occurs later in the text, with Heidegger bringing the artist into the equation:

> The work's createdness.. can obviously be grasped only in terms of the process of creation. Thus, constrained by the facts, we must consent after all to go into the activity of the artist in order to arrive at the origin of the work of art. The attempt to define the work-being of the work purely in terms of the work itself proves to be unfeasible.[379]

This is point at which Heidegger reaches the critical formation of unity between the work, the creator and the viewer, forging a locus where "truth can happen."[380]

Heidegger's much documented association with, and willingness to work according to the ideals of German National Socialism[381] meant that after the Second World War he was severed from the academic mainstream. Furthermore, this forged a reactionary response from the post-war philosophers for whom Heidegger's personal flaws amounted to philosophical flaws. Tainted by, although, it seems now critically absolved of, his relationship with Nazism, Heidegger's work gave way to the shift as presented herein by Adorno and (perhaps most importantly with regard the subject/object relationship) Habermas. Though Heidegger's impact on twentieth century philosophy –

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[378] Martin Heidegger. "The Origin of the Work of Art" *Poetry, Language, Thought* Trans. by Albert Hofstadter (London. HarperCollins Publishers, 1971) p 127

[379] ibid.

[380] ibid., p. 161.

[381] Further reading: Tom Rockmore. *On Heidegger's Nazism and Philosophy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992)

particularly German philosophy – is immeasurable, the turn against him is no more evident than in Adorno. Adorno's departure from the pursuit for truth as perceived by Heidegger was shaped as a *negative* dialectic. In this section I will draw, from 'the Habermasian turn,' the distinctions between the works of Adorno, Habermas and Kiefer that emphasise the value of alternative readings for the benefit of understanding the conditions of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. For despite his paradigmatic leap from the Frankfurt School's aesthetic theory, there emerge particular features of Habermas's take on subjectivity that are very interesting when viewing *Notung*'s presence in the discourse surrounding Germany's past and the relationship the subject has with that past. I will briefly outline the shift from Adorno's thoughts on subjectivity to Habermas's, their respective relationship to the questions Kiefer asks of the viewer in *Notung*, and the differences between the works that are evidence of the importance of an ongoing consideration of works of art as works of philosophy.

It is easy to forget, in the morass of critical debate, that these are mere mortals, whose flaws are often disguised by complex text. The vilification of Heidegger by Adorno (responded to, in turn, with nonchalance[382]) is a reminder of the often-personal backdrop to philosophical disagreement. Indeed, it is not uncommon to find that, in the midst of such antagonisms, there is common philosophical ground. Regarding Adorno's most critical dissection of Heidegger, undertaken in his book *The Jargon of Authenticity*:

> Adorno's authentic concern – this would have been the term in the "jargon of authenticity – was really akin to Heidegger's. And he was aware of this. In 1949 Adorno had urged Horkheimer to write a review for *Der Monat* of Heidegger's just published book *Holzwege* (False Trails). He wrote to him that...Heidegger was "in a way. .not all that different from us."[383]

Perhaps the most noteworthy feature of this difficult relationship is how it defines the

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[382] Richard Wisser, recalling a conversation with Heidegger in 1969. "We talk about Adorno. *Heidegger*: When Adorno came back to Germany, he said, I was told: 'In five years, I'll have cut Heidegger down to size.' You see what kind of man he is. *I*: A small statement but a great feeling of power. He was certainly mistaken in the matter, but there are many signs that the impact he has does not help further the reception of your thinking... *Heidegger*: I have never read anything of his. Hermann Morchen once tried to convince me to read Adorno. I didn't. Mark Scroggins *Culture Industry*, Online resource (http://kulturindustrie blogspot com/2006/01/heidegger-adorno html). Accessed 12:12, July 20, 2009.

[383] Rüdiger Safranski *Martin Heidegger Between Good and Evil* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998) p. 413.

nature of German thought in the twentieth century, and, furthermore, the reactionary shifts that are reflected in this thesis. That these philosophers find themselves personally at odds with each other, despite their shared concerns, and the consequent effect this has on their work, highlights the parallel shifts in visual art. By building a backdrop to the shifting conceptualisation of subjectivity – be it reactionary or not – I will arrive at Kiefer's attic with a conclusion befitting my claim that while certain works of art or philosophy are complimentary in shared concern and method, other works, while of shared concern, are methodologically incongruous. That this incongruity is as valuable a relationship as congruence will be evident upon conclusion. I will turn, now to Adorno, before concluding with Habermas.

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> In the artwork the subject is neither the observer nor the creator nor the absolute spirit, but rather spirit bound up with, preformed and mediated by the object."[384]

Naturally, the chapter in *Aesthetic Theory* titled, simply 'Subject-Object' contains the most formed of Adorno's contemplations concerning the relationship. While the language he uses remains difficult, it is not so as to disguise his formulation. And, though Adorno's understanding of the relationship is not new, his development of this understanding in the context of the post-war German condition renders it 'anew.' Adorno's position (here, imagined as viewing *Notung*) is that while becoming conscious of one's self viewing, as subject, one then becomes an object in the room, albeit one external to the canvas. With this reading, Kiefer effectively turns this two-dimensional image into a multi-dimensional experience that absorbs the subject. One is, as the object, then expected to act according to what one is now an objective part of.

Adorno opens the chapter: "Contemporary aesthetics is dominated by the controversy over whether it is subjective or objective."[385] Typically dismissive of such controversy, Adorno simply pronounces them 'equivocal,' before corralling the debate accordingly:

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[384] op. cit., Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory.* p. 218

[385] ibid., p 215.

> Variously the controversy may focus on the conclusion drawn from subjective reactions to artworks, in contrast to the *intentio recta* toward them, the *intentio recta* being considered precritical according to the current schema of epistemology. Or the two concepts could refer to the primacy of objective or subjective elements I te artworks themselves, in keeping, for instance, with the distinction made in the history of ideas between classical and romantic. Or lastly, the issue may be the objectivity of the aesthetic judgement of taste.

To respond, Adorno, immediately and tellingly, calls on Hegel, for whom, according to Adorno, "the subject-object dialectic transpires in the object itself."[386] However, rather than being in the spirit of *homage*, this is rather the launch-pad for his reconstruction of subjective aesthetics. Perhaps more astonishing is Adorno's direction of a Kantian self-flagellation with *Critique of Judgement*:

> For Kant, even the aesthetic is subordinated to the primacy of discursive logic...the strongest buttress of subjective aesthetics, the concept of aesthetic feeling, derives from objectivity, not the reverse. Aesthetic feeling says that something is thus, that something is beautiful; Kant would have attributed such aesthetic feelings as "taste," exclusively to one who was capable of discriminating in the object.[387]

Adorno counters, flashing his modernist credentials with defined determinations concerning what constitutes aesthetic feeling and how this, in turn, affects our understanding of what constitutes art:

> Aesthetic feeling is not the feeling that is aroused: It is astonishment vis-à-vis what is beheld rather than vis-à-vis what it is about; it is being overwhelmed by what is aconceptual and yet determinate, not the subjective affect released, that the aesthetic experience may be called feeling.[388]

Indeed, upon encountering *Notung*, observing the technical proficiency of Kiefer's rendering of perspective and the stage-set dimensions of the work and central point perspective "drawn to its most insidious extreme"[389] Adorno's claims appear, at first, apt. There was 'astonishment,' and subsequent feelings that one would thus consider (according to Adorno's proclamations) 'aesthetic,' however these qualities, typical of the

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[386] ibid., p. 215.

[387] ibid., p. 216

[388] ibid , p. 217.

[389] op cit., Huyssen p. 38.

autonomous modern work of art so central to Adorno's conception, merely awaken the external forces of Kiefer's conceptualism. Objectively, these technical 'effects' enable a perceptual engagement with the attic. Indeed, the work is so successful that it is easy to forget that the stretcher, the nails, the canvas and the media applied to it – all objects unto themselves – form a new object that I now appear to be granting, in its mimetic membrane, further, and what's more, *critical* objects for consideration. Conceptually, however, Kiefer's engagement with Germany's historical, cultural and political vacuum left in the aftermath of the Second World War reaches beyond the confines of Adorno's aesthetic theory, and challenges his perception of what art is:

> The question...of what is and what is not an artwork cannot in any way be separated from the faculty of judging, that is, from the question of quality of good and bad. The idea of a bad artwork has something nonsensical about it: If it miscarries, if it fails to achieve its immanent constitution, it fails its own concept and sinks beneath the apriori of art In art, judgments of relative merit, appeals to fairness and toleration of the half-finished, all commonsense excuses and even that of humanity, are false, their indulgence damages the artwork by implicitly liquidating its claims to truth. As long as the boundary that art sets up against reality has not been washed away, tolerance from bad works – borrowed from reality – is a violation of art.[390]

In this tract, Adorno's ongoing problem with his barely disguised distaste for forms of art that challenge or counter modernism persists, with this concession:

> It is possible concretely to conceive of artworks that fulfil the Kantian judgment of taste and nevertheless miss the mark. Other works, indeed new art as a whole, contradict that judgment and are hardly universally pleasing, and yet they cannot thereby be objectively disqualified as art.[391]

Adorno reaches the crux of his thesis shortly thereafter, with this claim:

> As contrary poles, subjective and objective aesthetics are equally exposed to the critique of dialectical aesthetics: the former because it is either abstractly transcendental or arbitrary in its dependence on individual taste; the latter because it overlooks the objective meditatedness of art by the subject. In the artwork the subject is neither the observer nor the creator nor absolute spirit, but rather spirit bound up with, performed and mediated by the object.[392]

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[390] op cit., Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory.* p 217.

[391] ibid., p. 218

[392] ibid.

It is on these terms that I define a distinction between Adorno and Kiefer, and, consequently, Adorno and Habermas. I will come to develop the relationship between Kiefer and Habermas, in spite of their apparent disparity, shortly; first we must consider the shortcomings in Adorno's theory with regard to post-war visual art.

Again, knowing Adorno's limited scope and understanding of artistic practice means that his theory is difficult to project beyond the confines of his beloved Viennese atonal compositions. However this is not my core concern; rather it is Adorno's ongoing commitment to empowering the object, his consideration of the creative subject as labourer not communicative entity, as little more than an "extension of a tool."[393] Adorno lacks any intersubjective formula, instead framing the scenario as one in which (particularly, he states, in music and poetry) "the poetic fictional character...[and her/his]...subjective expression scarcely ever coincides immediately with the condition of the composer."[394] Within *Notung* we find multiple subjectivity as historical and socially contextualised, rather than fictionalised. Adorno does make certain astute observations, attempting to posit a collective 'We' as a solution. However, the Marxian emphasis remains overbearing:

> The labour in the artwork becomes social by way of the individual...The intervening individual subject is scarcely more than a limiting value, something minimal required by the artwork for its crystallization. The emancipation of the artwork from the artist is no *l'art pour l'art* decision of grandeur but the simplest expression of the work's constitution as the expression of a social relation that bears in itself the law of its own reification. Only as things do artworks become the antithesis of the reified monstrosity. Correspondingly, and this is the key to art, even out of so-called individual works it is a We that speaks and not an I – indeed all the more so the less the artwork adapts externally to a We and its idiom.[395]

Perhaps the most fruitful approach to Adorno's attention to the object is in the possibility of reconciling the subject-object divide, and Kiefer's capacity to overcome previously dichotomous conditions:

> ..the paintings emphatically (one might say explicitly) take account of the position of the viewer in front of the picture plane...Kiefer's canvases from the 1970s can be understood as a pictorial

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[393] ibid , p. 219

[394] ibid.

[395] ibid., p. 220

> form of Brechtian theater, and that the true object of the paintings' critique is not Nazism, but rather the contemporary German viewer's relationship to Germany's Nazi past.[396]

Kiefer's particular engagement with the subject-object relationship shines new light on the shift from Adorno to Habermas. To be conscious of one's own presence, the evocation of an(other) subjective consciousness creates a circuit between the artist > image > viewer. When informed of, and accustomed to, this relationship, the viewer is able to engage with the representation of the attic.

> If Kiefer's work could be said to represent history, albeit at times obliquely and certainly not in the form of the conventional, or traditional history painting, it does so only with the foregrounded acknowledgement that such an endeavour is fundamentally compromised, if not impossible.[397]

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To summarise this section's reading of the attic and its significance as a locus for subject-object theory, I will close the overview of Habermas. Of the texts presented herein, the essay 'Modernity - an Incomplete Project' is Habermas's most clear enunciation of his aesthetic theory, while 'An Alternative Way out of the Philosophy of the Subject: Communicative versus Subject-Centred Reason' outlines his break from the traditions of Adorno, et. al. These readings expose two key issues that affect the aspect of this thesis that considers *concept* and *form*. First, by implication, it exposes the historical and political demands that shape Habermas's response to the notion of subjectivity and its philosophical significance. Secondly, and consequently, it exposes the way a work of art, freed of the linguistic complications the dialectic encounters, has taken the question of post-war German politics to a realm unavailable to post-Adornian German philosophers. While this is at odds with the first part's marrying of a work of art (Beuys's *Auschwitz Demnstration 1956-1964*) to a work of philosophy (Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*) it remains true to the thesis that considers a work of art *as* a work of philosophy, by effectively claiming that it makes up for shortcomings experienced by way of textual work.

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[396] Anna Brailovsky "The Epic Tableau: *Verfremdungseffekte* in Anselm Kiefer's Varus" *New German Critique* (Volume 71, Memories of Germany, Spring - Summer, 1997) p. 116.

[397] op. cit., Saltzmann. p. 2

> His strategy is to return to those historical "crossroads" at which Hegel and the Young Hegelians, Nietzsche and Heidegger made the fateful decisions that led to this outcome; his aim is to identify and clearly mark out a road indicated but not taken: the *determinate* negation of subject-centred reason by reason understood as *communicative* action.[398]

Thomas McCarthy's explication of the bridge Habermas builds between pre-Hegelian negation of subject-centred reason and his own project to reclaim the subject as a critical player in the recrafting of modernity is not, strictly speaking, the *intersubjective* approach so often credited. Rather, Habermas find a commonality in subjectivity that is the fodder for communicative action. Though not explicit, the relationship this theory has to Habermas's aesthetic theory will become clear shortly. First, I would like to outline Habermas's theory of communicative action, arguably his most significant contribution to contemporary philosophy.

> I have...*suggested* that the paradigm of the knowledge of objects has to be replaced by the paradigm of mutual understanding between subjects capable of speech and action.[399]

Despite the intricacies of Habermas's proposal, this ulterior paradigm is quite simple. However, let us take into account the ambiguous subjectivity presented by Kiefer in *Notung* when reading this next passage:

> Fundamental to the paradigm of mutual understanding is...the performative attitude of participants in interaction, who coordinate their plans for action by coming to an understanding about something in the world. When ego carries out a speech act and alter takes up a position with regard to it, the two parties enter into an interpersonal relationship.[400]

Clearly Habermas writes here of two individuals relating via a 'speech act,' however, recall Kiefer's statement – *The painting which I am creating becomes the other person who approaches me by posing a question* – and reconsider this founding tenet of communicative action. I acknowledge the peculiar conditions I am proposing for this hypothesis,

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[398] Thomas McCarthy. "Introduction" Jurgen Habermas *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987) p vii.

[399] ibid., pp. 295-296

[400] ibid , pp 296-297.

however I believe that the significance of Kiefer's rendering of this space is so bound up with the notion of the subject that recourse to this theory is important. Unlike his predecessors, Habermas rejects the object as the critical element in the dynamic. How does this affect the reading of *Notung*? I believe that it circumvents the difficulties object-centred theories impart on the reading by re-emphasising the subject, be they painter or viewer, and turning the attention on the questions subjectivity raise in relation to Germany's traumatic history. The Heideggerian and Adornian theses, for all their differences, transpire to diminish the responsibility of the subject in light of such conditions. That *Notung* is a representation of this trauma, or, more specifically, the vacuum resulting from this trauma, means that it is essentially non-objective. We might refer to this passage from Habermas to define shared subjective experience as critical to the success of communicative action:

> ...interaction participants then no longer appear as originators who master situations with the help of accountable actions, but as the *products* of the traditions in which they stand, of the solidary groups to which they belong, and of the socialization processes within which they grew up.[401]

The argument that Habermas's theory is largely dependant on language and grammar systems, and thus unable to be transferred to a reading of something as un-systematic as the visual field occupied by *Notung*, is reasonable only so far as interpretation allows. That Hal Foster (regarded as among the pre-eminent art critics and theorists alive today) chose to open his critical text *The Anti-Aesthetic* with "Modernity – an incomplete project" is testament to the possibility of engaging with alternative readings. In this essay, Habermas turns his attention to the relationship art has with the practices of historicism:

> . the time consciousness articulated in avant-garde art is not simply ahistorical; it is directed against what might be called a false normativity in history. The modern, avant-garde spirit has sought to use the past in a different way; it disposes of those pasts which have been made available by the objectifying scholarship of historicism, but it opposes at the same time a neutralized history which is locked up in the museum of historicism.[402]

The essay welds Habermas's critique of object-centred philosophy to his aesthetic philosophy; citing Walter Benjamin's 'posthistoricist attitude' and Daniel Bell's

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[401] ibid., p. 299

[402] Jürgen Habermas. "Modernity – An Incomplete Project" op. cit., Foster. p. 4.

questioning of the possibility of avant-garde culture in subject-centred society:

> ...modernist culture is altogether incompatible with the moral basis of a purposive, rational conduct of life...stirs up hatred against conventions and virtues of everyday life, which has become rationalized under the pressures of economic and administrative imperatives.[403]

Kiefer's role is made art-historically relative (and favourable to interpretation within a Habermasian model) by way of Habermas's rejection of the preceding generation's praxis, evident in this barely disguised swipe at Beuys:

> But all those attempts to level art and life, fiction and praxis, appearance and reality to one plane; the attempts to remove the distinction between artifact and object of use, between conscious staging and spontaneous excitement; the attempts to declare everything to be art and everyone to be an artist, to retract all criteria and to equate aesthetic judgment with the expression of subjective experiences – all these undertakings have proved themselves to be sort of nonsense experiments. These experiments have served to bring back to life...exactly those structures of art which they were meant to dissolve.[404]

There difference of aesthetic tradition and personal/circumstantial experience separates Beuys and Kiefer (made starkly evident in the studies of *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* and *Notung*) mirror Habermas's distinction from Adorno. Irrespective of their practice, as participants in the process of reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation, the methods of engagement require a negotiation of the subject-object divide. Habermas's involvement with the *Historikersreit* highlights the emergent conditions within which intersubjectivity came to the fore. That Habermas believed in the practical application of theory is evident here, however there is little in the text that explicates any more than a formulaic system for communicative understanding. While works like *Notung* (and, for that matter, his adoption of otherness as evident in the *Occupations* series) present a more ambiguous and antagonistic position, they nonetheless occupy a special place alongside Habermas. Indeed, I contend that *Notung*, painted in 1973, some ten years before Habermas formulated his theory of communicative action, forms a pre-emptive expression of Habermas's re-conceptualisation of subjectivity. During the course of this study, I have considered Habermas and Kiefer as alternately complementary and supplementary to each other, enacting a scenario that I propose will

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[403] ibid., p. 5.

[404] ibid., p. 10.

come to benefit philosophical studies. That is, like the Adorno/Beuys comparison before them, the Habermas/Kiefer comparison serves to bolster the theoretical understanding of the concepts with which both artists have, respectively engaged. However when the relationship is reversed, there is an emerging, *post-philosophical* condition that informs the philosophical work when considering the works of art. And, on a purely aesthetic level, one might note that while Adorno was a trained composer, and was (irrespective of one's opinion of his cultural perspective) a creative practitioner, Habermas is strictly read as a theorist, and benefits from cultural enrichment. Either way, we are again witness to the visual art work's capacity for spatial and temporal conflation of concept, its experientially enriching qualities, and reminded of its value in the contemplation of matters deemed 'philosophical.'

2.3.3 The sword and Wagner

> *Ein Schwert verhieß mir der Vater!*
>
> - the text on *Notung* taken from Siegmund's line in 'Die Walkure' *Der Ring des Nibelungen* by Richard Wagner

> A mature mind should be able to hold together two contradictory facts: first, that Wagner was a great artist and, second, that Wagner was a disgusting human being. Unfortunately, one cannot have one fact without the other.[405]
>
> - Edward Said, *Better to Know*

Undoubtedly the most striking yet surreptitiously perplexing feature of the painting is the sword that has been lodged in the right foreground of the attic floor. The sword, in both name and representation, is inextricably linked to Richard Wagner's operatic masterpiece, *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (otherwise referred to as *Der Ring, The Ring Cycle* or Wagner's *Ring*), and will thus be considered the 'gateway' to the importance both culturally and symbolically, of this imposing figure and his import in the consideration of German culture and ideology. This section will also consider the text scrawled across the painting – *Ein Schwert verhieß mir der Vater.* This text (taken from the second opera of the cycle, which translates as *A sword pledged to me by my father*) means the work is at once a reminder

[405] Edward W. Said. "Better to know" *Le Monde Diplomatique* (October, 2001) p 112.

of Germany's cultural history and the generational binding of trauma.

It is impossible within the confines of this text to explicate an essence or premise of Wagner's *Ring*, let alone the lasting impact of its controversial symbolism. Nevertheless, if one brief diversion is to be made during the course of this thesis, few could be more valuable than one in which the role and importance of Richard Wagner in German cultural and ideological history is explained. That Kiefer has so deliberately and starkly used a Wagnerian symbolic reference points to the representational power the composer wields. In order to maintain focus on the task of drawing the philosophical from Kiefer's work, this section must concern itself only with the operas of *Die Ring* that involve *Notung*, and draw from the 'Wagnerian ideal' those references that make Kiefer's use of the sword motif such an interesting contribution to the work and the greater project of *Vergangenheitsbewaltigung*. Furthermore, it must presume some knowledge of the cycle among readers, or a willingness to explore it further to comprehend the reference in depth. I will, however, proffer some background on Wagner and *Die Ring* so that the reader understands Wagner's ambiguous relationship with Germany's cultural development. I will then outline as best possible the reception of *Die Ring*, as it remains Wagner's most recognised (and arguably most significant) work. The second and third (of four) operas in *The Ring – die Walkure* and *Siegfried* – contain the scenes within which the sword *Notung* appears. I will tie these scenes into the greater reading of Kiefer's work, and conclude by recourse to the philosophical significance of this feature.

Since Wagner's death, in 1883, aged seventy, his work has been both honoured and loathed. Although, as Edward Said points out in his essay "Better to know" this reception has, since the demise of Nazism, shifted almost entirely to the latter:

> Because some of his music sounds grandiose and Germanic (however one takes that misused adjective), because he was a composer exclusively of operas, overbearing and deeply concerned with the Germanic past, myths, traditions and achievements, and because he was such a tireless, verbose, pompous prose expounder of dubious ideas about inferior races and sublime (Germanic) heroes, Wagner is a difficult person to accept, much less to like or admire.[406]

It is *Die Ring* that has galvanised emotions above all. No other operatic work has

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[406] ibid.

attracted as much critical attention, and the visible political impact of Wagner's work remains, some 120 years after his death. For example, in 2001 an Israeli parliamentary committee demanded a boycott of conductor Daniel Barenboim's performance of Wagner's music at a Jerusalem festival. In a statement that resonates with the cultural 'erasure' pictorially presented in Kiefer's attic, committee chairman Zvulum Orlev vowed that Wagner "be declared a cultural *persona non grata.*"[407] This position stems from Wagner's extreme anti-semitism and posthumous association with Hitler, who idealised Wagner as the ultimate German composer and promoter of Aryan supremacy. Naturally, Kiefer points to this in his choice of cultural reference; but why specifically use the sword, *Notung*?

To lead the reader to the significance of the sword in Kiefer's representation, certain basic details of the plot are necessary. Of course, central to this explication is the significance of the Ring itself. The actual ring after which the opera is named forms the core moral thematic of the cycle, and is introduced in the opening act of the prelude opera, *das Rhinegold.*

In this first scene, three Rhinemaidens are introduced as guardians of a wealth of raw gold lying beneath the surface of the Rhine. A Nibelung[408] dwarf named Alberich appears, and farcically, attempts to charm the maidens, who only ridicule his appearance and his lust for them. Their mockery is interrupted, when sunshine, breaking through the darkness, illuminates the raw gold. The inquisitive Alberich is told of the gold's magical powers, availed only to those who renounce love. The renunciation of love allows the owner to forge the raw gold into a ring, and its bearer will be granted dominion over earth. Already one can read the political overtones of such a paradox, particularly knowing Hitler's veneration of Wagnerian themes. It is taken for granted that the gold would remain safe, as it presumed no one would renounce love, especially when inflamed by lust. However, Alberich, who has been deterred in his clumsy attempts at winning the

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[407] Author not credited. *BBC News Online* (http.//news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/arts/1455466.stm) Tuesday, 24 July, 2001. Accessed 14:37, December 11, 2005.

[408] The origins of the characters and the plot of *Die Ring* is in the Germanic and Norse mythology surrounding the Burgundian royal family. The folkloric qualities of this mythologic have been carried throughout German history by the poem *Nibelungenlied.* The origins of the poem remain the subject of great debate, however its translation is sourced from Middle High German, an era marked, linguistaically between the 11th and 14th century For further detail of the origins of the poem and Wagner's adaptation of this mythology for *Die Ring* see Arther Regan "Folktale Morphology and the Structure of *The Nibelungenlied*" *Pacific Coast Philology* (Volume 13, October, 1978) pp 78-85

love of the Rhinemaidens, sees the chance to satisfy his desires through power. He renounces love, takes the gold, and retreats, to forge the Ring.

Having established the plot surrounding the power of the Ring, the second scene finds Wagner introducing the character Wotan, extending and complicating *Die Ring*'s moral dynamic, and developing the trace that leads to the appearance of *Notung*. Wotan, a Zeus-like figure is, broadly speaking, the paternal figure of the cycle, and is bound to the Ring by bargains, deals and contracts circling around loved ones (his wife, Fricka, and her sister, Freia), giants (Fasolt and Fafner), gods and the dwarf Alberich. As Patrick McCreless observes in his text *Wagner's Siegfried: Its Drama, History, and Music*:

> The three operas of the trilogy proper – *Die Walkure*, *Siegfried*, and *Gotterdammerung* – focus on Wotan's attempt to restore the natural order and redeem his guilt: to win back the Ring from the giant, Fafner, to return it to the Rhinemaidens, and thus to revoke the Curse put upon it by Alberich when it was taken from him by the gods.[409]

The second opera (or first of what McCreless consider the 'trilogy proper'), *Die Walküre* explains the story of Siegmund and Sieglinde, son and daughter of Wotan:

> The drama develops, on the one hand, out of the fortuitous reunion of the twins after a long separation, and on the other, out of Wotan's unfortunate miscalculation of the role of Siegmund. He intended Siegmund to be the hero who would reclaim the Ring; but Wotan is forced by his jealous wife, Fricka, to concede that his son is not independent at all, but only a pawn of his father. Since Siegmund's winning the Ring would not be an act of his own free will, Wotan is morally bound to wait for another hero to accomplish the task. His miscalculation thus constrains him to doom Siegmund to death in battle...the union of Siegmund and Sieglinde, however, has made it possible for Wotan's hopes to be carried into the next generation, for a son, Siegfried is born to Sieglinde after her brother's death.[410]

Amidst this morass of incest and murder is Wagner's method of generational construction of the cycle (bound by Wotan's deific ever-presence), which is important in the reading of Kiefer's *Notung*. Indeed, the words scrawled across the top of Kiefer's work – *Ein Schwert, verheiß mir der Vater* – reference and represent this dynamic which has been imbued with added import for Kiefer as he looks to Germany's past and the

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[409] Patrick McCreless. *Wagner's Siegfried: Its Drama, History and Music* (Ann Arbor, Michigan. UMI Research Press, 1982) p. 2

[410] ibid.

relationship he has with the generations that perpetrated the crimes of the Nazi era. Before engaging in the analysis of Kiefer's relationship to Wagner's themes and principles, I would like to move, finally to the opera *Siegfried*, from whence the story of *Notung* is drawn.

The character for whom the opera is named is the son of Siegmund and Sieglinde and possesses a tragic heroism of the classical mould. Of Siegfried, Wagner wrote:

> I have sought in Siegfried to represent my ideal of the perfect human being, whose highest consciousness manifests itself in the acknowledgement that all consciousness must find its expression in present life and action.[411]

Considering Wagner's odious anti-Semitism, and Hitler's political obsession with racial purity (and Wagner), the stature of Siegfried in political symbolism has been recognised by Kiefer.[412] The loathsome Nibelung dwarf Mime, brother of Alberich and Siegfried's manipulative adoptive parent, counters his character. Siegmund's murderous fate was sealed in a complexity of dealings between Wotan and his most treasured daughter, Brünnhilde, while Sieglinde died in childbirth. Here, we might note Slavoj Zizek's Foreword to Adorno's *In Search of Wagner*, where the actors in *Die Ring* are viewed as the actors in Nazi Germany:

> ...Hitler knew very well how to play this double game apropos the Holocaust, using Himmler as his Hagen [Alberich's son]...A lot of historicist work has been done recently trying to bring out the contextual 'true meaning' of the Wagnerian figures and tropes...The idea is that Wagner is mobilizing historical codes known to everyone in his epoch: when a person stumbles, sings in cracking high tones, making nervous gestures, and so forth, 'everyone knew' this to be a Jew...[413]

For instance, the trace of premodern Germanic deism that is incarnate in the figure of

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[411] Richard Wagner. *Richard Wagner's Letters to August Rockel* Translated by Eleanor C. Sellars (Bristol: J.W. Arrowsmith, 1897) p. 99.

[412] We might also turn to Slavoj Zizek, who, in his Foreword to Adorno's *In Search of Wagner* links the actors in *Die Ring* with the actors in Hitler's party: ".. Hitler knew very well how to play this double game apropos the Holocaust, using Himmler as his Hagen [Alberich's son]...A lot of historicist work has been done recently trying to bring out the contextual 'true meaning' of the Wagnerian figures and tropes...The idea is that Wagner is mobilizing historical codes known to everyone in his epoch when a person stumbles, sings in cracking high tones, making nervous gestures, and so forth, 'everyone knew' this to be a Jew " Theodor Adorno. *In Search of Wagner* Trans Rodney Livingston (London. Verso Second edition, 2005) p. xiii.

[413] ibid.

Wotan is certainly evident in the political construction of Germany in the years between unification and Hitler's accession to power (1871-1933). As in other European states, the mood in Germany for nationalism and imperial drive was overwhelming, and with the exception of the ill-fated democratic and liberal forces of the Weimar Republic, the mood remained until it was shaped into Hitler's Nazism. By striking this sword into the foreground of this attic, Kiefer triggers this deep contemplative cycle and transcends the differences between art, music, history and philosophy.

Returning to the philosophical context and Kiefer's reference, and consider the plot of *Siegfried* as an allegorical reference to the development of German political culture during the twentieth century, I would like to close with an investigation into the representational power of the sword – *Notung.*

As an aesthetic element, the theatrical disruption the sword affects functions independently of any Wagnerian reference. Speared in the foreground to disrupt the ghostly calm of the attic's emptiness, the sword as an autonomous form is highly effective as a counter to spatial aesthetic of the attic. Pre-painted, cut out and then applied as collage, the sword's slightly profiled edges, contribute to the sense that it is 'not-of' the painting. That there is no marking on the floor where the sword's point of entry should be highlights this pastiched and spectral presence. Kiefer has scrawled *Notung!* above the handle of the sword – an almost primitive *Wagner-was-here* type graffiti – perhaps the images only overt (and, for that matter, unnecessary) reference.

While *Notung* in this form might appear as little more than a Wagnerian prop, the sword has been historically and culturally laden with quite defined symbolism that shapes our aesthetic interpretation. Though one of the most basic forms of weaponry, the sword, as used in art and emblem, represents the same dichotomous ideals that are bound to modern weaponry. That is, that as a weapon of force, violence and destruction it might also be defended as representing the pursuit of honour and the defence and protection of an ideal. Or, it might be argued that while a weapon is as critical to the machinations of oppression, it is likewise necessary to the pursuit of liberty, and so on. From militarism to mythology, Christian iconography to Jungian psychoanalysis, swords maintain this pattern. Certain psychoanalytic readings aside (the fallocentric symbolism of the sword as penis and the sheath as vagina), the overarching symbolic meaning is consistent:

> A highly prized weapon of great significance, it is.. a symbol of honour, strength, and courage, of the highest achievement of knightly chivalry, of royal prerogative and power, of marshal vigilance, and intellectual discrimination. Gods of war and storm commonly have a sword as one of their attributes, and the sword consequently becomes a symbol of divine justice, dividing good from evil.[414]

This balance between the enforcement of good, or defence against evil is, however bound to further meaning according to various mythologies:

> ...it came to be symbolic of the penetrating power of the mind, and encourages the wielding of trained intellect to bring about the results we seek. The *making of a sword* incorporates all the elements: Earth, Fire, Air, Water. This is a powerful point as it confirms the energetic pattern of the sword presents wholeness, balance, totality, and the unification of all resource...As an alchemical symbol aspects of the sword are representative of purification through the process of life and death...As a Celtic symbol, the sword is connected to gain, wealth, honour, and establishment of hierarchy. [415]

Stevens continues, to conclude, "Often swords are markers of familial ties, and indicate victories won for the purpose of insuring the survival of blood lineage."[416] As a Wagnerian prop in Kiefer's rendering of the memorial space, *Notung* embodies all of these elements. The notion of 'blood lineage' is the critical final piece of this puzzle, pointing to the importance of this inheritance as elucidated by Habermas.

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In terms of both recognition and critical reception, Anselm Kiefer now stands among Germany's great living artists. His reconfiguration of aesthetic and cultural taboos has come to represent progressive reconciliation. That he broke from the Beuysian agenda and aesthetic is crucial when considering this response, and his now significant body of work is an extraordinary, and often very beautiful foil to the thickets of text that have come to represent the mainstream philosophical response.

Of the four works of art studied in this thesis, *Notung* stands out as a painting.

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[414] Anthony Stevens. *Ariadne's Clue: A Guide to the Symbols of Humankind* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999) p. 287

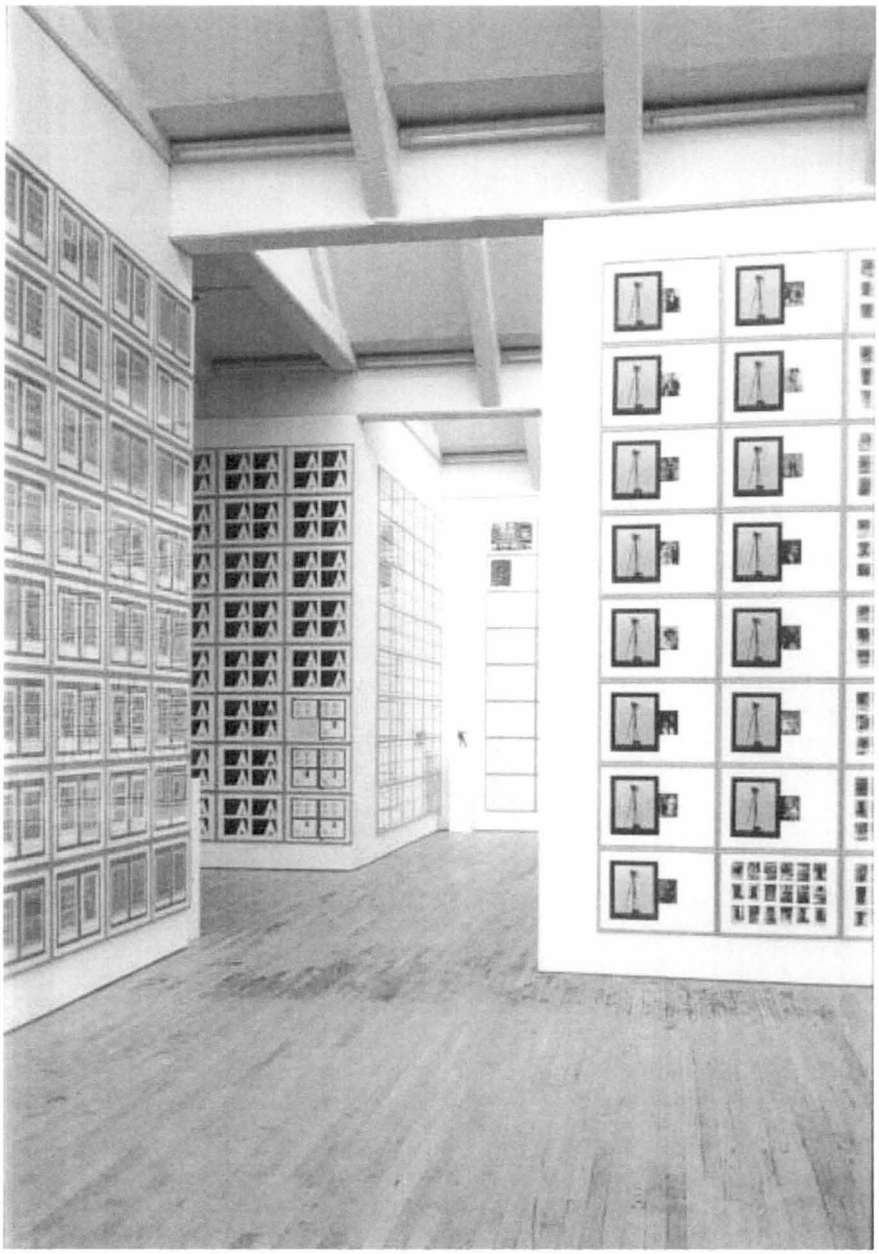
[415] ibid

[416] ibid.

However, behind the historically established façade of traditionalism and normalcy that the two-dimensional work of art appears to present, lies a work of fortitude that stands alone as exemplary of the power of visual art's conceptual impact beside the certain limitations of that language. Kiefer's masterful circumvention of the paradox inherent in the portrayal of space is one example of his mastery of the visual field. In *Notung*, this negation, forged by the demolition of Germany's cultural tradition, is inverted by Kiefer's sophisticated rendering of *the attic*. Kiefer realises that in responding to history's call the simple duality of question and answer has instead been replaced by the need to understand what questions need to be asked.

3. HANNE DARBOVEN –

KULTURGESCHICHTE 1880-1983



(Fig. 33) Hanne Darboven. *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* (1983)
Installation, Mixed Media. Dia: Beacon. New York.

Like Joseph Beuys and Anselm Kiefer before her, Hanne Darboven takes critical aim at the representation of history. In this study, I will treat Darboven's work *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* as I have *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* and *Notung* before; as a work of

art that challenges our ideas about how philosophical thought might be formed, and extends our understanding of what art does.

What distinguishes Darboven's work is its resistance to alignment with any philosophical current. Indeed, this might be seen as a critical juncture, where the readings of works of art enter a *post-philosophical* phase. That is, unlike Beuys and Kiefer, for whom such a task was a matter of considering their works as contributions to a greater, and more defined ideological project, Darboven's work resists any such association. And, despite the best efforts of those responsible for the extensive Darboven database provided by the Dia Art Foundation[417] (holders of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*) to invest, in Darboven, a philosophical depth by way of reference to an impossibly diverse list of writers and thinkers,[418] such pluralism serves only to weaken any such investment:

> There are many angles from which to interpret Hanne Darboven's work, but the interpreter can go too far, as Sibylle Omlin does, when she says, "... far-flung freedom of interpretation characterizes Hanne Darboven's visual works..." Far-flung interpretations are always possible, but they often fling far from the work. Darboven's work prohibits any one entrance point from providing 'information' toward understanding the whole. The viewer studying the minute details feels the massive piece hovering above, and the viewer looking at the whole piece for its formal/aesthetic qualities feels something is missed by ignoring the details. To follow the lead of the work, the viewer must operate on the switch from micro to macro (at the snap of the snap-to-grid) toggling between the two always frustrated by never having grasped it all.[419]

Despite the oft-stated claim that the very *raison d'etre* for visual art is its depiction of that for which text, in particular, is inadequate, a work like *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* benefits immeasurably from the deciphering qualities text provides, particularly (to invert David Colosi's syntax) 'from macro to micro.' Of course, this has much to do with the emergence of new concepts and media into an art practice that had for so long existed alongside the aforementioned mantra. While it remains true that words necessarily fail to capture the moment when the viewer stands before, or is surrounded by a work of visual art, the minutiae that might be critical to its construction is often well served by text. It

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[417] This database available through the Dia Art Foundation's Beacon Gallery website.
http://www diabeacon.org/exhibs/darboven/project/

[418] The online database has referential quotations from. Samuel Beckett, Julia Kristeva; Gilles Deleuze; Walter Benjamin; Gustave Flaubert, Jorges Luis Borges; Roland Barthes; Michel Foucault and Theodor Adorno.

[419] David Colosi "Hanne Darboven She is very busy writing" *The Centre For Three-Dimensional Literature* (http://www 3dlit org/practice/darboven/darboven1.html#_ftnref3) Accessed 13:32, 15 August, 2009

has been argued that the very emergence of works of art forged conceptually makes the viewer dependent on such interpretation. In his seminal essay, "The Art World," Arthur C. Danto uses Andy Warhol's 1964 artwork *Brillo Soap Pad Boxes* to explain this shift:

> What in the end makes the difference between a Brillo box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo Box is a certain theory of art. It is the theory that takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is (in a sense of is other than that of artistic identification). Of course, without the theory, one is unlikely to see it as art, and in order to see it as part of the artworld, one must have mastered a good deal of artistic theory as well as a considerable amount of the history of recent New York painting. It could not have been art fifty years ago. But then there could not have been, everything being equal, flight insurance in the Middle Ages, or Etruscan typewriter erasers. The world has to be ready for certain things, the artworld no less than the real one. It is the role of artistic theories, these days as always, to make the artworld, and art, possible.[420]

That Darboven (and those responsible for maintaining *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*'s online presence) willingly cites works of art theory certainly contribute to this interpretation. For instance, Adorno's ongoing presence is assured when Darboven muses: "My friends in the United States, they could make art. I, as a German, didn't dare to...as Adorno has said, 'After Auschwitz one can no longer make poetry.'"[421]

3.1 The shaping of Darboven's *Kulturgeschichte*

Darboven is not one to flippantly insert philosophical reference into discussion; in a later installation – *Requiem for M. Oppenheimer* (1985) – Darboven incorporates Adorno's dictum within the work as text-on-the-page. A far less cryptic work than *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, *Requiem for M. Oppenheimer* is centred upon

> ...an assemblage of musical instruments: a piano, a horn, a drum, an accordian, and a zither represent the Auschwitz concentration camp band that Max Oppenheimer, an Austrian Jew and Secessionist painter, played in to forestall his death at the hands of the Nazis. The instruments also appear throughout the piece in a photograph placed at intervals among Darboven's diaristic documentation and official-looking notations, rubber stamps, and addresses. Within the texts on

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[420] I refer here to work such as Arthur Danto's essay "The Art World" first published in *The Journal of Philosophy* (Volume 61, no. 19, October 15, 1964) pp 571-584

[421] Hanne Darboven in Juliette Laffon. "Hanne Darboven, *Schreibzeit-Weltansichten*" *Revue du Louvre* (April, 1994) p. 89.

the framed pages, one finds a quote from critic/philosopher Theodor Adorno questioning the viability of poetry after Auschwitz.[422]

As noted in the section detailing the ethical implications of his thoughts in relation to Beuys's work, Adorno's words have been overused and misinterpreted to the point of overwhelming his ultimate revocation. Thus, one must not rest one's case concerning Darboven's philosophical impulses on this example alone. As will become evident throughout the course of this study, examples such as this are but fragments of her philosophical scope as presented in *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*. Rather, what is critical here is Darboven's insistence that she 'dare not make art.' If Darboven 'dare not make art' and, if (as she has consistently asserted) she is 'not an artist,' what, precisely, *is Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* and what is her role? The answer (and what is contentious) is in my proposal that in difference to Beuys and Kiefer (whose works are presented herein as either complementary or supplementary to philosophical currents) Darboven's work stands, albeit in a post-philosophical sense, as a philosophical work in its own right. Contributing to this reading is the conceptual multiplicity that informs her work, damning any attempts to align the work with any body of philosophical work or philosophical current. What this represents in the progress of this thesis is a shift *beyond* the confines of the previously suggested relationship between art and philosophy, into a new position where a work of art is so profoundly multiplicitous as to be *informing* thought, perhaps more than it is informed by thought itself.

According to the thesis, this is hardly a radical position, as it has already been shown that to some degree Beuys, and to a greater degree Kiefer, was in possession of pre-emptory faculties for presenting their respective concerns. Darboven, though bound by birth to 'the German question' engages with this question anew. Herein I contend that she does so by presenting a conceptual backdrop that is not fully enunciated in philosophy. Darboven is as concerned with dialogue between the arts as she is with philosophy, creating 'constellations' whereby musical and literary works are integral to her practice. This system defines Darboven's withdrawal from the notion of art practice altogether, as evident I her claim: "I am not an artist."

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[422] Author not credited. Hanne Darboven, *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* Dia Art Foundation (http://www.diacenter.org/exhibs/darboven/project/twentysix.html) Accessed 11:19, January 12, 2009.

Detailed records of Darboven's childhood remains scarce; born in Munich, in 1941, Darboven spent most of her youth and early adulthood in Hamburg, enrolling in the Fine Arts programme at the Hamburg Hochschule für Bildende Kunst in 1963. That she was a qualified and practicing concert pianist for some years beforehand usually appears as a mere footnote to any discussion of her youth; a major biographical flaw considering the significance of musical composition and performance to her visual work.

What is widely known is that in 1966, Darboven moved to New York, where she met fellow artist Sol LeWitt. Though his influence and popularity was at its peak at the time of his meeting with Darboven, on his passing in 2007, LeWitt's legacy as one of the great exponents of conceptual art was established. This meeting was critical for Darboven:

> LeWitt was intrigued by Darboven's drawings, geometric diagrams on graph paper, and soon they became close friends Following an introduction arranged by LeWitt, Darboven had her first solo exhibition at the new Galerie Konrad Fischer in Düsseldorf in 1967. Exhibiting in prestigious galleries and museums in Europe and the U.S. from that moment on, Darboven has emerged as one of the leading practitioners of Conceptual Art.[423]

Such an abbreviated biography, which elsewhere might be considered evidence of tardiness in research, becomes, in the study of Darboven, an indication of her withdrawal from the process and the de-humanisation of her work. This emphasises the dutiful approach Darboven takes to her work, a strident (if not deliberate) confirmation of her opposition to Beuys's self-mythologisation and ever-presence in the consideration of his work. In this way she is more in common with Kiefer's disciplined and workman-like approach. However, unlike the varied aesthetic trajectories ridden by both Beuys and Kiefer throughout their careers, Darboven's is marked, instead, by a systematic commitment to numerical and graphic documentary, and its resulting aesthetic. This is something Darboven clarifies in one of her typically austere and forthright proclamations: "Art is a mixture between concept and discipline."[424]

Her early "'permutational drawings' on graph paper" pre-empted the systematic framework that would enable her to "see more concentratedly, find some interest,

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[423] Author not credited. Hanne Darboven, *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* Dia Art Foundation. (http://www.diabeacon.org/exhibs/darboven/project/s.html) Accessed 16:04, August 8, 2008.

[424] Laurence Weiner *"It is What it is* – Obituary: Hanne Darboven" *Artmag – art online from Deutsche Bank* (http://www db-artmag.com/en/53/news/obituary-for-hanne-darboven) Accessed 13:45, July 23, 2009.

continue at all."[425] It was at this nexus that Darboven began to engage conceptually with temporality, leading to a course of work that culminated in *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983.*

Looking at the title of the work, we are reminded immediately of Beuys's vitrine, which also has a 'temporal enclosure'[426] within its title. There are certainly similarities; like Beuys's work, Darboven's contains elements that have come from earlier works and are incorporated into the new. However, Darboven's work is less a quest for a *working-through* of personal/national trauma, and more a questioning of how time is represented in an ontological and historical sense. In keeping with the method employed throughout this thesis, I will look at the elements that make up *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* and consider them according to the theoretical trends concurrent with Darboven's own thought. Where this inquiry differs is that rather than consider the elements as distinctly and respectively dealing with philosophical concerns, it presents them as entirely new renderings of *thought as form.*

Integral to this reading of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* is a more expansive philosophical backdrop. As noted in the final passages on *Notung,* the problematic relationship German philosophy forged with art and aesthetics has shaped this study's acknowledgement of the more sensuous and sophisticated turn to aesthetics and art in French philosophy. From Ranciere's point of departure in the last chapter to Bernard Stiegler's interest in notions of time and memory (sourced from within the French tradition but also greatly influenced by Heidegger), there is, in contemporary French thought, a perfect foil for the dominant German thought presented thus far. Furthermore, despite the significance of Darboven's 'German-ness' Darboven's work is considerably less 'German' in its symbolism and intent. The years spent in New York forming some her most critically regarded works certainly adds to this perception. Thus, proffering Darboven as 'foil' to Beuys and Kiefer extends this thesis' scope.[427]

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[425] Hanne Darboven "Statement to Lucy Lippard " Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds.) *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999) pp. 62-63.

[426] This term loosely borrowed from: Bertrand Russell *Our knowledge of the external world as a field for scientific method in philosophy* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1914) Further explanation gleaned from: Sajahan Miah *Russell's Theory of Perception* (London: Continuum, 2006) pp. 166-172

[427] Telephone interview with Lynne Cooke, Senior Curator, Dia:Beacon August 17, 2008.

3.2 The site: Dia:Beacon, New York

Beyond a study of the work itself, this inquiry has methodological importance for its expanded reading of the experiential nature of viewing art. While I have viewed both *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* and *Notung* on location, *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* can only be viewed via reproductions in catalogues and on the internet.[428] Indeed, a visit to the Dia:Beacon in New York might yield little of benefit for the Darbovenien; *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* remains in storage, and, unlike Kiefer's *Notung* (mounted on a sliding rack in the storage vaults of the Museum Boijmans, and thus satisfactorily viewed in its entirety) *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* – as an installation composed of many and multifarious elements – is stored in dozens of crates and folios.

This initially reared as problematic, for though Darboven's work is an excellent case study, I had not seen the work *in situ*. Unable to present the experience of *being* in the Dia:Beacon – integral to the explication of my engagement with both Joseph Beuys's *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* and Anselm Kiefer's *Notung* – I was concerned that this otherwise ideal study would be methodologically discordant. Despite Darboven's growing reputation, the expansive *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* has not been granted the permanent location given the Block Beuys. Being disassembled for storage has meant that viewing the work whole is simply not possible, and viewing the work in parts logistically difficult, if not unsatisfactory. I questioned Lynne Cooke, Curator-at-Large for the Dia Art Foundation and curator of the centre's original installation of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, shortly after Darboven's death of lymphoma in March 2009, to see if her passing, and the publication of Dan Adler's monograph on the work were important enough catalysts to re-install the work. Her response was to the point:

> Unfortunately, the question of reinstallation of Kulturgeschichte involves conservation questions, and particularly the light levels for parts of the piece, rather than just a matter of institutional interest or priority, so for the present we are not planning to reinstall the work.[429]

Progressing from the discourse surrounding the subject/object in Kiefer's work and its

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[428] The only detailed and/or complete documentation of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* is an expensive (currently valued at between US$18,000-$30,000) limited edition publication of a box-set of plates detailing each of the 1,590 works on paper and the 19 sculptural works comprising *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*. There are none in Australia. I was, therefore, wholly dependent on the limited imagery available in books and online.

[429] Email from Lynne Cooke, Senior Curator, Dia·Beacon, to author Received June 13, 2009

relationship to the Frankfurt School's own tradition of discussing this relationship, I recognised a shift in the comprehension of works of art; that is, while seeing the work of art *in situ* is an excellent (and, arguably, preferred) experience, the vast majority of viewers engage with a work of art as a reproduction, either on the page of a book or, increasingly, on the computer monitor. This lead to the question: How does this affect the subject?

It became realistic to consider *my* experience with *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* as significant for precisely the distinct relationship *all* viewers now have with it. After all, were this thesis valid only from the perspective of those who engage directly with the work of art *in situ* then might it immediately be limited and less valuable? Does presenting this thesis from the viewpoint shared by most – rather than the few – strengthen its claims and contribute, with volume, to the discourse? Of particular interest is the increasing significance of the 'on-line' experience of art; here, Darboven's work 'ceases to exist' in a gallery context, but 'lives on' as an on-line resource dedicated to *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983.*

In this 'domain' Darboven's work gains certain theoretical depth, for here the viewer can, in a different sense, interact with the work, accessing visual and, significantly, textual references to the work that are otherwise unavailable to the gallery-goer. In an earlier conversation with Cooke, it was explained that the website was constructed by the gallery without consultation with Darboven. For an artist so clearly concerned with the presentation of her work, to allow such freedom of interpretation says much about Darboven's deliberate disengagement. However, the multifarious philosophical viewpoints presented in the website are not invitations to engage in scatter-shot interpretation; rather, that it is implicit that *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* is not aligned with any movement, or body of work, but that it presents an entirely new meditation on memory, history and the ambiguous temporality that binds the two.

3.3 The work: *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*

To comprehend the construction of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, the viewer must extend her or his interest beyond the confines of the gallery. Indeed, the viewer must extend her or his interest beyond *the appearance* and consider certain factors critical to Darboven's practice and the resulting works. Naturally, all artists have sources of inspiration and impulse; I need only reiterate briefly the importance the historical, the political or the spiritual played in Beuys's or Kiefer's works to understand, immediately, how activity

external to the installation or canvas is crucial to the understanding of its representation. However, Darboven is somewhat distinctive for the consistency of the external influence on her work, determining the explication herein. Moreover, the two influences – music and notions of temporality – are as inextricably bound to each other as they are with Darboven's visual practice. Before entering the descriptive analysis of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* itself, I will introduce Darboven's work according to her engagement with music and notions of temporality as a foundation study, effective for all further readings of her work.

3.3.1 Darboven and music

While Dan Adler's recent monograph is an excellent and timely contribution to the study of Darboven's work, he chooses to exclude Darboven's musical composition as an element of her visual composition. What makes the investigation undertaken herein significant is that it considers musical composition as the key to her visual practice. Only rarely (and, then, briefly) is Darboven's early career as a trained concert pianist – a role in which the disciplined adherence to and understanding of time is critical – considered an essential factor in her aesthetic. Furthermore, by stepping outside the gallery so as to retrieve the source material for Darboven's work, we might circumvent certain logistical problems that the researcher encounters. If the work itself is not available for viewing, we must use everything available in order to build an understanding of the artist's intent. That work such as *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* serves to explode conventions of arts practice and theory makes it a particularly useful study for the viewer in these new conditions of reception.

Perhaps the first step in outlining the philosophical impulses that guide Darboven's work, we need to understand what distinguishes her work. While Beuys's work enabled a contemporaneous comparison with Adorno's (and similarly Kiefer's with Habermas's), *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* refuses to conform to any such proposal. We might, for example, note that while Darboven's highly systematic and methodical practice and aesthetic are in many ways antithetical to Adorno's thoughts concerning system and method, such disparities shroud fascinating bonds that are at once historically curious and theoretically illuminating. This diachronic relationship is typical of the relationship Darboven has with the theorists against whom her work is frequently measured. To explain this dynamic, consider Darboven's relationship with music.

Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983 is but one work in a series of installations with which there is reciprocity with a systematic and methodical composition of music. Darboven's career as a trained pianist prior to her move to New York, and her life-long engagement with musical form are critical factors for understanding her visual arts practice. This draws attention to Adorno's high regard for Viennese composer Arnold Schoenberg and his later criticism of the Darmstadt School, in particular John Cage's association with the School's composers in the 1950s and 1960s. John Cage is recognised as one of the twentieth century's most innovative and influential composers, whose challenges to the preconceptions of classical composition have him cast as hero to the avant-garde and villainous iconoclast in almost equal measures. Having already outlined the certain limitations in Adorno's artistic appreciation, his distaste for Cage's challenge to Schoenberg's harmonic theory is hardly surprising. However, the bluster surrounding Adorno's proclamations is diffused somewhat with hindsight. Here, Ian Pepper, explains, first, Adorno's critical engagement with the Darmstadt School's members:

> Adorno's lecture "The Aging of the New Music"...informed the members of...the "Darmstadt School" – among whom Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and the Venetian Luigi Nono were the most celebrated – that they had failed to comprehend the warning contained in his *Philosophy of Modern Music* and had in fact succumbed to a species of fetishism of the musical material, substituting mere quantification for the necessary critical and historical reflection on the development of compositional method.[430]

Before continuing, mirroring my concerns regarding the perceived disunity between Adorno's theory and Cage's (and, by association, Darboven's) avant-gardism:

> Cage – far from being a musical prankster of a Dadaistic vaudeville – was the only composer capable of squarely facing the immanent dissolution, even the self-destruction, of musical meaning as such, which functions in Adorno's analysis of the 1940s as an allegory of the self-destruction of reason. This argument is faithful to Adorno's instinct for the primacy of the negation of meaning in advanced works of art, and to his recognition of the historically contingent status of the European conception of the work of art.[431]

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[430] Ian Pepper. "'Aesthetics of Indifference' to 'Negative Aesthetics": John Cage and Germany 1958-1972' *October* 82 (Autumn, 1997) p 35.

[431] ibid., p 37

I contend that by way of presenting this constellation of composers/artists/philosophers we might raise the hypothetical consideration of how Adorno might consider Darboven's work, and progress further into the supplementation of philosophical and artistic form.

Considering Pepper's dissolution of the Adorno/Cage 'face-off,' and the Cage/Darboven partnership forged by (among others) Joachim Kaak and Corinna Thierol in the exhibition of drawings made by the two, it becomes easier to consider Darboven as a participant in the critical discourse surrounding the relationship between modernity and avant-gardism as cornerstones to twentieth century aesthetic philosophy. Starting with Schoenberg, under whom both Adorno and Cage studied, a thread can be traced to Darboven that outlives them all. The historical backdrop to these questions of inheritance and legacy is outlined in J.A. Dacy's monograph "*I have nothing to say and I'm saying it...*: John Cage defined in the 1950s." Dacy opens with the understanding that Schoenberg carved a divide in 'legitimate' classical music that separated him from the rivalry of Igor Stravinsky's more traditional composition:

> Stravinsky composed in much the same classical tradition of the previous 200 years. Schoenberg was more of a musical progressive, exploring aspects of tonality that were completely different from the traditional classical music. Cage's early compositions were stylistically heavily modeled after Schoenberg's work, placing him firmly in the Schoenberg 'camp.'[432]

Cage's studies with Schoenberg between 1933 and 1935 were profoundly influential, evident in his effusive proclamation: "I worshipped Schoenberg – I saw in him an extraordinary musical mind, one that was greater and more perceptive than others."[433] Schoenberg's great legacy is essentially as "...one of the – indeed the – protagonist of musical modernism"[434] and "his name...associated with two epic inventions:"[435]

> ...the renunciation of tonal composition in the wake of the "emancipation of the dissonance" in expressionist atonality around 1910, and, a dozen years later, the development of...12-tone music

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[432] J A. Dacy. "*I have nothing to say and I'm saying it....* John Cage defined in the 1950s " Honours Thesis. University of Maryland, 2008. p. 24.

[433] Richard Kostelanetz. *Conversing With Cage* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1988) p. 5.

[434] Hermann Danuser. "Arnold Schonberg – Portrait of a Century" Online resource for The Arnold Schonberg Center, Vienna (http://www.schoenberg.at/1_as/essay/essay_e.htm) Accessed 16:44, September 8, 2009

[435] ibid.

> or dodecaphony. These compositional innovations are certified by works of the highest rank, their possibilities having been artistically proven beyond all theory and explicit poetics. That 20th-century music historiography has now also recognized the epochal break before the First World War in the works of Igor Stravinsky, Béla Bartók or Charles Ives, which for some time has gone beyond Adorno's dichotomy expressed in his "Philosophy of New Music" (whose author believed he could elevate Schonberg's rank by disparaging his colleagues, especially Stravinsky), lends Schonberg's contribution to music history additional historical weight.[436]

However it was only a matter of time before Cage's own exceptional talent and challenging mind turned on the theory of his master. Schoenberg's concern with harmonic dissonance became anathema to Cage, who "...saw structure differently...because the only trait inherent to both sound and silence is duration, he surmised that rhythm was the defining structural element of music."[437] Cage recalls, while studying with Schoenberg:

> I certainly had no feeling for harmony, and Schoenberg thought that that would make it impossible for me to write music. He said, "You'll come to a wall you won't be able to get through." So I said, "I'll beat my head against that wall." [438]

Explicating the progression of this relationship serves two purposes: first, it clarifies Adorno's theoretical regard for Schoenberg and Cage respectively; second it brings Darboven's musical work (and, consequently, her visual work) into context. The relationship between her compositions and her disciplined, laborious and near mechanical productivity is bound, as were Cage's, to a concern of rhythm and question of duration; historical, memorial and finally, aesthetic. Where Cage built up tensions between tonal space and form, Darboven employed numerical patterns to register an oddly beautiful banality of repetition:

> My systems are numerical concepts, which work in terms of progressions and/or reductions akin to musical themes with variations. In my work I try to expand and contract as far as possible between limits known and unknown. Generally, I couldn't talk about limits I know.[439]

While it is true that the repetitious and rhythmic oscillations of pencil-stroke and collage

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[436] ibid

[437] op. cit., Dacy.

[438] op. cit., Kostelanetz.

[439] Hanne Darboven. "Artists on Their Art" *Art International* (Volume 12, no.4, 20 April, 1968) p 55

within *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* provide actual referential keys to Darboven's accompanying composition *Opus 17A*, the greater aesthetic of the installation considered whole provides a clue to the way to approach the works as bodies. *Opus 17A* was composed for double bass, and first performed at the Dia:Beacon opening of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, on March 28, 1996, by Robert Black. Metronomically bound to numerical/temporal reference points throughout the work, *Opus 17A* is, like other visual/musical works Darboven created, notable for its subtle variation that affects a sense of progression that cleverly mimics the calendrical measure of time. Darboven has used this method before, and, though not strictly incorporated into *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, it pays to consider this as exemplary of the discipline she applies to her work overall.

The most comprehensive overview of the relationship between the musical and the visual in Darboven's art is in the catalogue accompanying her 2008 exhibition at the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin, *Hommage à Picasso*. There are three, short essays in this catalogue that detail the musical score, *Opus 60*, that accompanies the installation, and, while two of these are specific to this work, these essays are, collectively, the most insightful produced thus far. The first of these texts is a transcript of a discussion between musicologist Gerd de Vries and critic and curator Sibylle Omlin, and provides some of the clearest descriptions of Darboven's practice as bound to musical form. By engaging musicology rather than visual art theory, Darboven's intricate system and technique is laid bare. For instance:

> Sibylle Omlin: ...What does music mean to her work and the development of her artistic language?
>
> Gerd de Vries:. First, perhaps, a few basic remarks about Hanne Darboven's musical system. .Essentially, it goes like this: in the classical notation system, the staff, there are five lines and four spaces, a total of nine specified areas. A tenth area can stand either above or below the staff. The result: I can express all the single digit numbers (0 through 9) in musical notes...All of Darboven's work are based on number constructions (what she calls 'number scores'), that is, calculations of the sums of the digits in calendar dates...there are various ways to represent a number graphically. A digit, say 5, can be expressed by five boxes or five U-shapes or ..written out five times: as digits "5 5 5 5 5," as the number name "five five five five five," or as rising sequence "one two three four five." Which part of such calculations, such constructions, is to be used for musical work is then determined based on compositional considerations.[440]

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[440] Gerd de Vries in conversation with Sibylle Omlin "Hanne Darboven My Work Ends in Music" *Hanne Darboven: Hommage à Picasso* (New York: The Solomon R Guggenheim Foundation, 2006) p 57.

Nevertheless, when asked to classify Darboven's music "and evaluate it in terms of music history"[441] de Vries states: "It is so unusual, so unique...there hasn't been anything like it before."[442]

The complexity of Darboven's system of calendrical mathematics that determine her musical and visual systems is well documented elsewhere, so I shall avoid further explication here, other than to demonstrate the system she has developed with which to form the countless and intricate sheets of paper that comprise her greater aesthetic project. This is not because they are not important; on the contrary, the importance of this system is such that most of the literature written about Darboven's work is concerned precisely with her calendrical systems. Rather, it is that this thesis is concerned with what Darboven's work represents philosophically and aesthetically that is of interest and significance beyond mere curiosity and academic pedantry. For the sake of informing the reader of the extreme complexity and discipline of Darboven's system, I will include this extract from an interview between Darboven and Ingrid Krupka:

> My notations are based on the daily dates of this year, (19)69:
>
> 69 = 17K → 58K = No. 1 → No. 42
> (K = Konstruction)
>
> The numerical dates of the days of the year generate a total of 42 sums of digits. These sums become progressively larger (from 17 → 58), increase in frequency (from 1 to 12) and then go back to 1.
>
> Specimen calculation:
> 1. 1. 69 = 1 + 1 + 6 + 9 = 17 → 1 X = No. 1 = 17 K
> 2. 1. 69 = 2 + 1 + 6 + 9 = 18 } → 2 X = No. 2 = 18 K
> 1. 2. 69 = 1 + 2 + 6 + 9 = 18 } → 2 X = No. 2 = 18 K
>
> The digits 6 and 9 of the year are added separately. All other double-digit numbers are treated as single numbers. All notes are written in figures. Every number is repeated a number of times equivalent to its numerical value.
>
> Example:

[441] ibid., p 60.

[442] ibid.

1. 1. 69 = 1 x 1 | 1 x 1 | 6 x 6 | 9 x 9 |
31. 12. 69 = 31 x 31 | 12 x 12 | 6 x6 | 9 x 9 |[443]

The listening experience, resulting from the system explained by de Vries in discussion with Sybille Omlin is, despite its conceptual underpinnings, pleasant in its subtle, if somewhat mechanical deviation. In the case of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, the notations and calculations formed by the calendrical space charted between the years 1880 to 1983 form the compositional framework for *Opus 17A*, its musical accompaniment. For the true sense of Darboven's intention regarding the contemplation of time as an historical or memorial measure, we must now leave this founding study, and move into the physical world of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*.

3.3.2 Temporality in *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*

> ...I believe that, encapsulated within many everyday events – and yes, possibly any event whatsoever – lies the essence of an entire century.
>
> Peter Høeg – *The History of Danish Dreams*

Being holistically integral to his work determined the personal and psychological profile of Joseph Beuys as essential for understanding his work, while the visual triggering of subjectivity evident in Kiefer's work determined a more cryptic investigation of *Notung*. Hanne Darboven's sentience is only apparent in her reservedness; her complete withdrawal from the role and practice of the artist leaves the viewer dependent on the aesthetic experience alone. That it has taken this long to engage with the work itself points to the complex nature of what is, on appearance, a rather orderly installation. That I have expended such effort to emphasise the musical compositional qualities of her work is significant; no other text offers such a comprehensive account of the link, a link I see as critical to understanding not only *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, but her entire life's work. Having established the importance of the measuring and documenting of time, I would like to enter this study by way of the work's title, itself a 'temporal signifier.'

Temporal signifiers attached to the title of two works discussed thus far – *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* and *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* – are, paradoxically (and, I should add, ironically), defining and deceiving. The assigning of dates to an object

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[443] Ingrid Burgbacher-Krupka *Hanne Darboven: The Sculpting of Time* (Ostfildern: Cantz Verlag, 1995) p 39

(according to the historical positivism from whence such a practice appeared) is a demarcation for the benefit of the witness. In the case of both *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* and *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, the dates proffered are both deliberately ambiguous and aesthetically discordant. Dan Adler goes so far as to consider the dates "arbitrary"[444] before delivering this more conclusive, albeit sweeping, statement:

> Darboven's history addresses the *fin de siècle* period and the changes in thinking it initiated; it encompasses World War I and II, the post-war reconstruction and Minimalism, and ends on the year the work itself was finished.[445]

It is not uncommon in Art History practice to assign dates as speculative referential flags. Without the artist's confirmation, such practice is, to coin a phrase, 'like shooting fish in a barrel.' There were no readily apparent historical occurrences that signal 1880 as significant, although to play along with the practice one might cite the birth of historian Oswald Spengler (whose book *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* presented a theory about the cyclical rise and fall of civilization) and death of Anselm Feuerbach (regarded as Germany's greatest classicist painter) in 1880 as, at the very least interesting, if not recognised by Darboven. But to quote the referential title of Lawrence Werner's obituary for Darboven, "It is what it is."[446] That is, that much of the speculation about Darboven's work's titling fails to take into account that the dry reality of Darboven's choice of temporal signifying is to take the burden of time from history, and to see these dates, any dates, as potentially historically significant:

> Darboven´s works are puristic. They are formally confined to the primary cultural techniques of writing and arithmetic. Her working materials are also simple: pencil, notepad, exercise books. Day in, day out, the artist completes a certain quota of work for various projects she creates in parallel. Once the concept has been determined, these require no innovation, rather a kind of processing, the consistently repeated and concentrated performance of an operation. When she talks about her work, therefore, Darboven speaks not of creativity, but of "doing" and fulfilment of duty...seen as the "emancipation" of each individual day or even as a democratisation of history – since historical dates exist side-by-side with "normal" days, which hold meaning for the individual only.[447]

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[444] op. cit., Adler. p 3

[445] ibid.

[446] op cit., Weiner.

[447] Petra Stegmann. "Hanne Darboven· Discipline and Obsession" *Culturebase· International Artist Database.* http //www culturebase.net/artist php?4060 Accessed 14 August, 2009. 18·22.

While Stegmann correctly observes the benevolent, democratising quality of Darboven's meditatively repetitive rendering of calendrical measurement of time, there is a darker aspect of Darboven's work that is reminiscent of Hannah Arendt's notion of the *banality of evil.*[448] Arendt, in Jerusalem reporting on the trial of the high-ranking Nazi official Adolf Eichmann, recognised a historically unprecedented normalisation of the broader participation in the perpetration of the Final Solution according to state loyalty and duty. This was popularly extended to incorporate the often-chilling realisation that evil not only resides in the theatre of war, but is necessarily a constant in familial and homely settings of such characters. Accordingly, we must not, when considering Darboven's work, assign any day a historical significance more than any other.

For example, on January 20, 1942 the senior officials of the Nazi Party met at Wannsee to discuss policy concerning Europe's Jewry, a meeting that came to represent the formulation of what has become historically referred to as the 'Final Solution.' While this date has become etched in history, Darboven's project refuses to assign any such significance, translating it as a calculation (20. 1. 42 = 2 + 0 + 1 + 4 + 2 = 9) which may then form a musical note (according to the system as explained by de Vries 9 = F). Transforming this historically tragic mark in time into a number or a note might seem callous in its calculatedness; however it is Darboven's intent to point out, in an almost Arendtian calling, that any day, and the innumerable variables that each individual brings to that day, has the potential to contain great evil and/or great good.

A final, important point concerning the title of the work, is its problematic translation into English. The title of Dan Adler's book – *Hanne Darboven: Cultural History 1880-1983* – contains the work's common translated title. My decision to use the German title was determined by the distinction outlined here:

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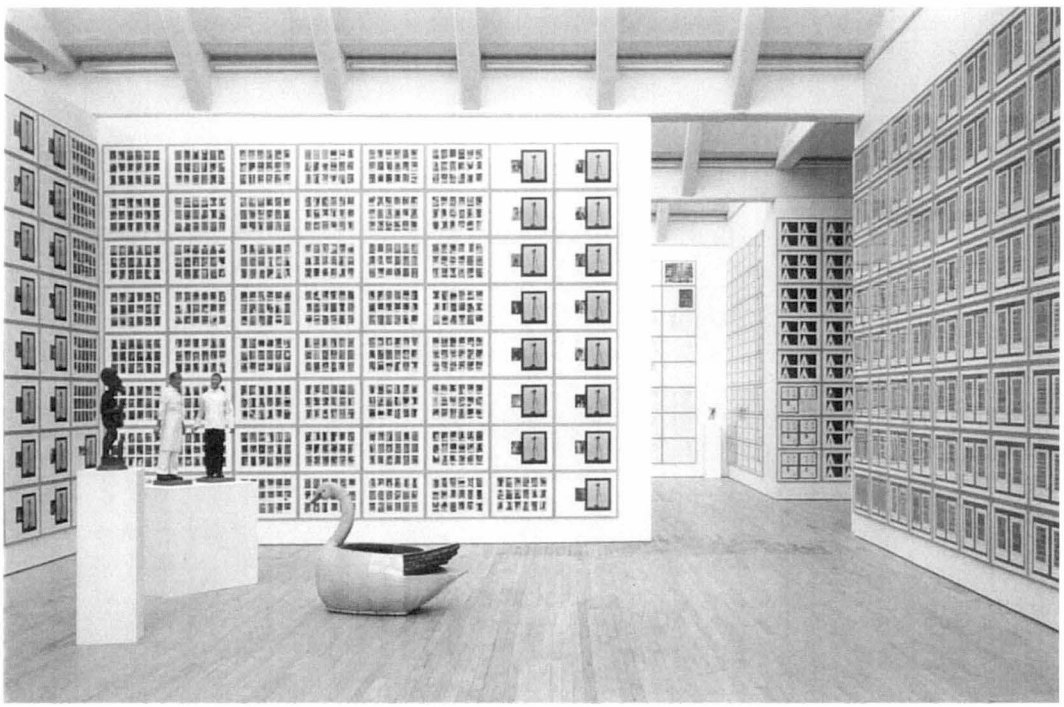
[448] In Arendt's oft-cited and controversial book *Eichmann in Jerusalem. a report on the banality of evil,* the phrase appears only in the last paragraph, detailing Eichmann's last minutes before his hanging: "It was as though in those last minutes he was summing up the lesson that this long course in human wickedness had taught us – the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought defying *banality of evil*" The phrase, as used here, is represented as it has come to be used in common language. Hannah Arendt *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a report on the banality of evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994) p. 252.

> There is only one word to denote both lived history and the intellectual operation that makes it intelligible (German on the other hand, distinguishes between *Geschichte* and *Historie*). Here we see the profound truth of this linguistic deficiency: the changes in our lives are of the same nature as the changes in the way we represent our lives.[449]

Darboven's work is so bound (in both concept and creation) to experiential, lived history that it seemed appropriate to refer to the work by its original, German title. That the Dia:Beacon also maintains this titling only strengthened its case to be used.



(Fig. 34) Hanne Darboven. *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* (1983)
Installation, Mixed Media. Dia: Beacon. New York.

Having initiated the reading of the conceptual forces behind *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* as relative to music and temporality, I would like to give this work some descriptive grounding. As I have already noted, the work is not currently installed, meaning that an overview of the physical construction of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* is possible only via the documentation of others. The readings presented herein are, thus, taken from the images available in print and in online resources.

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[449] Lawrence D. Kritzman and Pierre Nora. *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past, European Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) p. 2.

Though titled as a representation of the period 1880-1983, the work was apparently constructed (according to the dates provided in the documentation) between the years 1980 and 1983. This temporal parataxis and conflation is thus curiously referred to in the catalogue as *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983 (Cultural History 1880-1983)*, 1980-83, on exhibit from March 28, 1996 to June 29, 1997. Installed within Dia:Beacon's central, open-plan gallery space, the work consists of 1,590 'sheets' mounted on the walls and 19 sculptural works located throughout the room. These 'sheets' (as they are described in the catalogue) are in fact individual works, 70cm x 50cm in dimension, upon which Darboven has combined 'written' and montage/collage to create a visually ordered and rhythmic work.

In certain respects, *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* acts, particularly within the confines of this thesis, as a return to the Beuysian project. Many of these 'documents' have come from other, earlier exhibitions or projects, a practice Darboven shares with Beuys. Though Darboven has idiosyncratic designs for this work, it is reasonable to think that if, art-historically speaking, Beuys represents the turn in art that utilises this temporality as a creative force, Darboven's use of this method has its origin in the Beuysian practice. However, *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* has, to a far greater degeree than *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* extended its aesthetic reach beyond the gallery site, to forge a textual and musical aesthetic as well. Thus Darboven exceeds the Beuysian aesthetic project and enters a new realm, within which the use of the descriptive word *art* is avoided wholesale. This is a fascinating shift; while Beuys's conceptualisation of art is enthusiastically expanded, Darboven's appears cautiously contracted:

> Hanne Darboven's reticence towards the concept of art is conspicuous. She prefers to say "I write," "I make books," or "I make music," rather than confining herself to the word "art."[450]

We are witness, then, to an artist for whom the practice itself is transformed, by negation, into a work that transcends traditional definition. Beuys's ambitious expansion of creative action has, with Darboven, come full circle, to a point whereby the traditional notion of an artist disappears altogether. This is not simply the case with Darboven's more recent work. Indeed, one of the most fascinating aspects of Darboven's work is the

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[450] Sybille Omlin. "My Work Ends in Music: Hanne Darboven's Notations as Musical Works" *Parkett* (No. 67, 2003) p 126

patience and persistence evident in her project at a personal level. I will enter this reading of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* by considering the framed sheets on the walls of the gallery, before considering the sculptural elements. As there are 1, 590 of these framed sheets (and not all of them are available for viewing, and consequently not able to be interpreted) I will take from the works available the critical features that reflect the importance of Darboven and *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* in philosophical terms.

3.3.3 The works on paper

> Amine Haase: Is the concept underlying your work a principle of rejection?
> Hanne Darboven: In a way [it is] denial, otherwise an allusion. But, above all, rejection of form of expression. I use no forms of expression.[451]

In order to understand the scope of Darboven's work and her long-standing commitment to the concept, I would like to consider some of the early work that shaped her conceptual direction for the rest of her life. Take, for instance the two *Working Sheets/Constructions* recorded as being produced in New York between the years 1965-1969. Produced some 30 years before the exhibition of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, they are evidence of an early interest, if not obsession, with systematic art-making. As a significant aside, these works were from one of Darboven's earliest exhibitions, *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art.*[452] This is a very important recognition of Darboven's understanding of her practice, and a simultaneous reinforcement of this thesis' core premise. While it is common practice to point to her meeting with Sol LeWitt as the turning point in both her career and aesthetic formation, I should like to present her work as re-contextualised in the development of German art. What is rarely presented in any biographical reading of Darboven's development (and here one might speculate as to what art-historical reasons there might be for this inconsistency) is her initiation with work that "employed serial repetition, the Cartesian grid, and sculptural relief as central aspects,"[453] namely those exhibited by the German art collective *Zero* and (German-based) Brazilian artist Almir Mavignier at Documenta 3 in 1964. Her relationship with this work was strengthened during her studies under

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[451] Amine Haase. "Interview with Hanne Darboven" *Gesprache mit Kunstlern* (Cologne: Wienand Verlag, 1981) p. 132.

[452] op cit., Burgbacher-Krupka. p. 37.

[453] Valerie L Hillings. "A Portrait of the Artists: Hanne Darboven's *Hommage à Picasso*" *Hanne Darboven Hommage à Picasso* New York: The Solomon R Guggenheim Foundation, 2006 p 42.

Mavignier at the Hochschule in Hamburg:

> The Brazilian imparted to his students the lessons of his distinguished teachers at the Hochschule für Gestalting in Ulm, who included the Swiss artist Max Bill, a pioneer of Concrete art and advocate of mathematical approach to art; Joseph Albers, the great colour theorist of the Bauhaus; and Max Bense, a leading figure in the emerging field of information theory. From these influences, Mavignier had devised an objective system for art that entailed using a large nail to apply vividly coloured, thick dots of paint to the canvas to produce a series of geometric forms – most commonly squares. Following his example, Darboven was soon producing monochrome paintings that took the grid as their organizing principle and contained geometric reliefs from materials ranging from paint to nails.[454]

As is evident in her academic development – in both the musical and visual arts – Darboven's work was far more developed by the time she met with LeWitt than is popularly recognised. However, the importance of her association with LeWitt must not be underestimated. In this passage, art historian Rosalind Krauss identifies LeWitt's core creative premise, highlighting why Darboven found common ground:

> "Irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically." The consequence of following this direction, and LeWitt's art does obey it, is to arrive at the opposite of Idealism...To get inside the systems of this work...is precisely to enter a world without a center, a world of substitutions and transpositions nowhere legitimated by the revelations of a transcendental subject... Aporia is a far more legitimate model for LeWitt's art than Mind, if only because aporia is a *dilemma* rather than a *thing*.[455]

The direct influence of LeWitt on Darboven's thought and aesthetic is clear, however my next presentation – a document from Joseph Beuys's *Aktion Manresa* (Fig. 37) – is an excellent study for re-contextualising Darboven's work. While a very different document, it is, when placed alongside some of Darboven's New York *Working Sheets/Constructions* (Fig. 35 and 36), evidence of a convention of documentation and systematisation as typical of post-war German art as of New York conceptual art.

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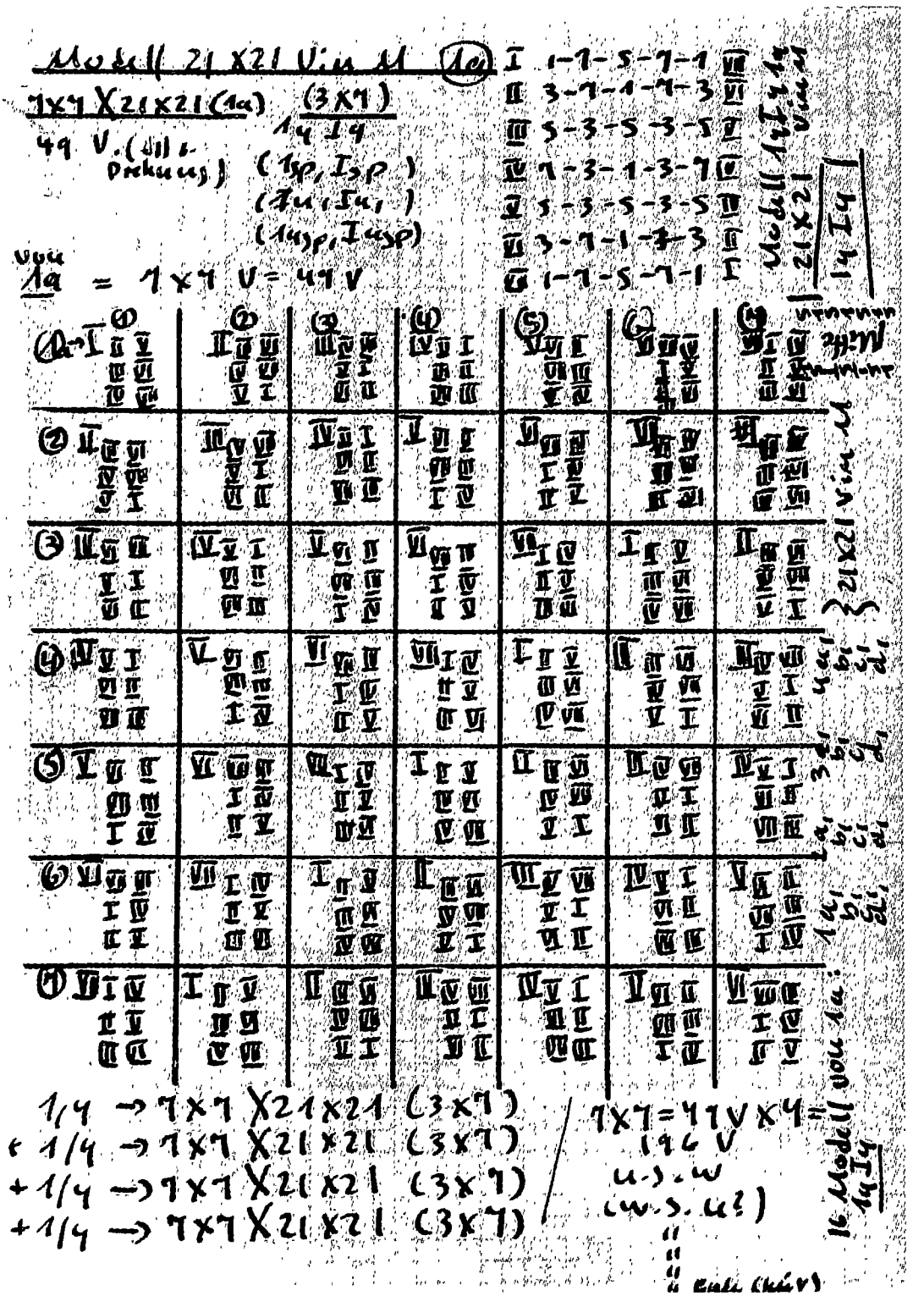
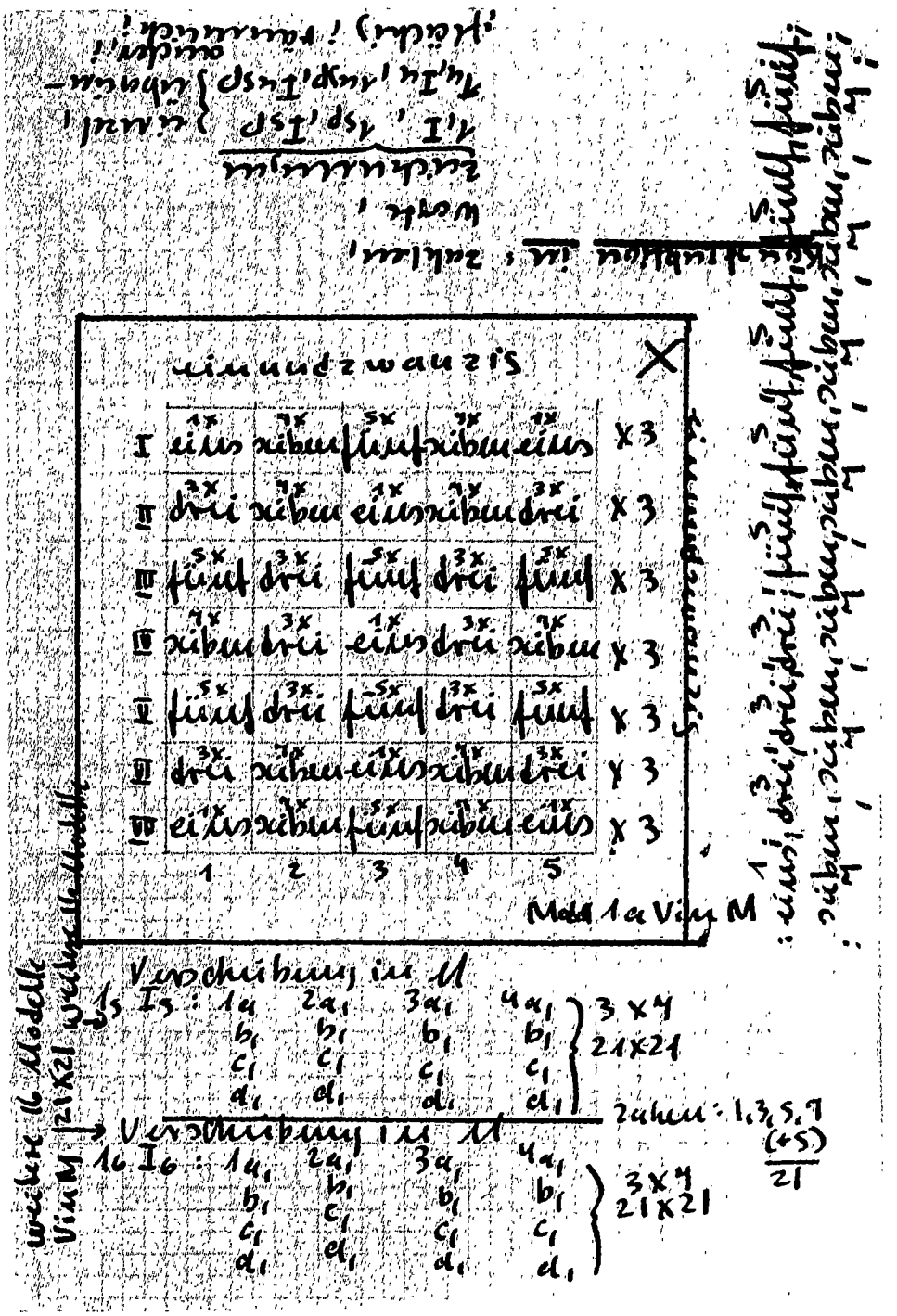
[454] ibid.

[455] Rosalind E. Krauss. "LeWitt in Progress" *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1985) pp 245-246.



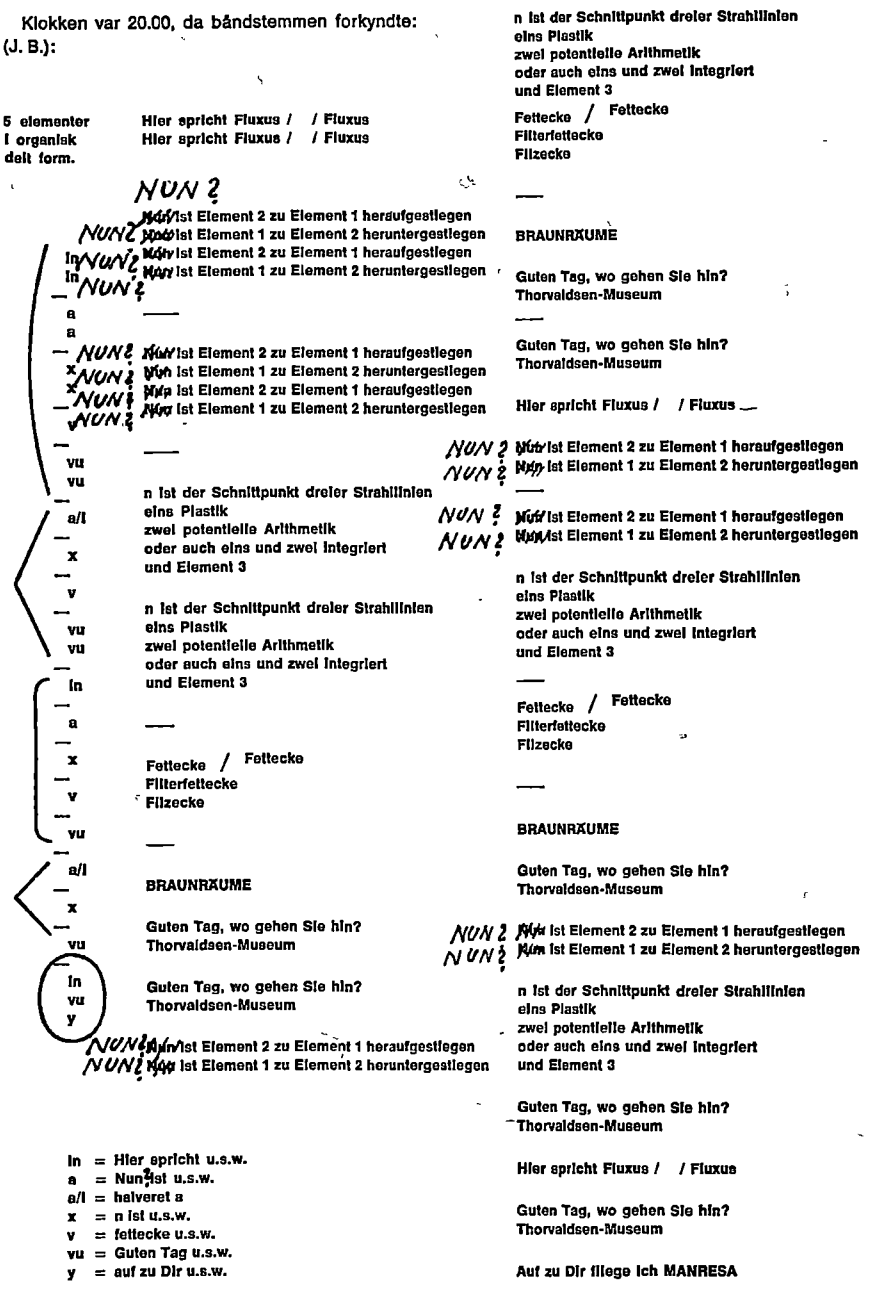
(Fig. 35) Hanne Darboven. *Working Sheets/ Constructions* (1965-1969)

Image taken from *Constructed Literary Musical HANNE DARBOVEN The Sculpting of Time.*



(Fig. 36) Hanne Darboven. *Working Sheets/ Constructions* (1965-1969)

Image taken from *Constructed Literary Musical HANNE DARBOVEN The Sculpting of Time.*



(Fig. 37) Joseph Beuys *Manresa* (1966) Schmela Gallery, Düsseldorf.

Understanding what this systematic documentation represents culturally is vital when confronting the 1,590 panels in *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*. For though Darboven had started to incorporate collaged imagery into her panels by 1980, the perpetuation of an aesthetic of repetition and metronomy remained. The insertion of imagery into her work certainly enhances her appeal as a visual artist, however the biographer or researcher remains challenged by Darboven's ongoing categorical negation. Indeed, it is only by the defaulting reliance on art-theory/art-historical references that Darboven's work is

considered primarily as a visual work of art:

> "I don't describe," she has said. "I write." Well, yes and no. For Darboven, 'writing' and 'drawing' function as 'thinking' and 'counting,' and this can be seen without exegesis.[456]

Despite the heritage of aesthetic and systematic creativity emanating from Beuys, Darboven's repudiation of the artist's persona and role is a significant consideration when reading her work in relation to the German condition and the aesthetic trajectory investigated herein. Like Kiefer, Darboven is of the 'next-generation' of German artists, whose work is deeply informed by the repercussions of actions perpetrated by their forebears. However, the vast differences between Kiefer and Darboven allow a fresh and fascinating take on the German question.

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> Repetition--even in its most mechanical, quotidian, habitual, stereotypical forms--has a place within art...For the only esthetic problem is how to insert art into everyday life. The more our daily life appears standardized, stereotyped, submitted to the accelerated reproduction of consumer goods, the more art must become part of life and rescue from it that small difference which operates between levels of repetition...so that, in the end, Difference can express itself...even if it's only in the form of a contradiction here or there, thereby liberating the forces needed to destroy this world.[457]

An exhaustive inventory of the works that make up the wall-mounted works, would be, at 1,590 titles long, a tedious affair for both researcher and reader. In order to demonstrate Darboven's work, I have selected six works-on-paper to discuss in relation to the central claim concerning her importance as a post-philosophical contributor to the discourse surrounding the representation of Germany's post-war history. Reading these works in this way will link Darboven to the theoretical framework established thus far, while building a new platform from which to view contemporary art as a significant contributor to this process and continuing the premise concerning such work as manipulating *concept and form.*

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[456] Frances Richard. "Hanne Darboven" *Artforum* (Volume 44, no 3, November, 2005) p. 252

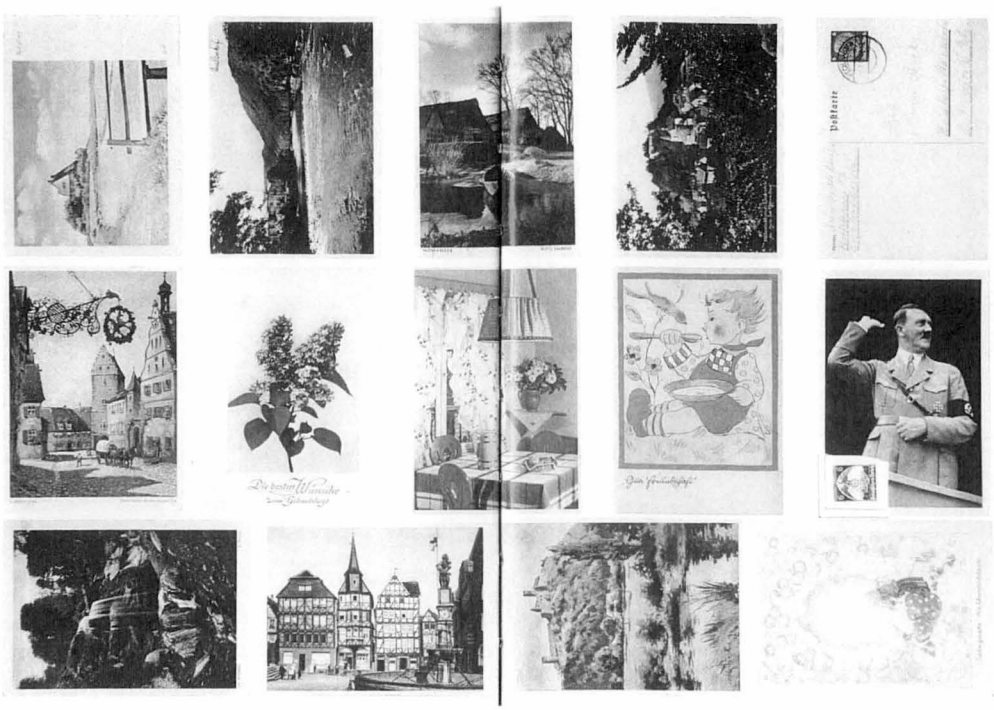
[457] Gilles Deleuze *Répétition et différence* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968) quoted and translated in Craig Owens *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) p 120

Reflecting the opportunity any researcher possesses – from the merely curious to the academically engaged – I have sourced reproductions from the aforementioned publication by Dan Adler. While Adler's text is excellent, and discusses these same works during the course of his text, my commitment to a philosophical and contextually established reading of these works provides a somewhat different interpretation. Moreover, keeping in mind the importance of presenting a way of understanding art that is no longer available for *in situ* viewing, I am demonstrating the selective skills such a viewer might adopt so as to engage with such a conceptually challenging work. Reflecting Darboven's systematic method, the six works in question are titled according to a box and plate number, and will be investigated in numerical order; thus:

(1) Box I, plate 162
(2) Box III, plate 33
(3) Box III, plate 53
(4) Box IV, plate 4
(5) Box IV, plate 210
(6) Box V, plate 33; Box V plate 163; Box VII, plate 139

While each of these works has aesthetic qualities independent of the greater work, they are (unlike the elements of the Block Beuys) fractional and simple elements of the whole of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*. Thus, the text devoted to each will be less expansive than that devoted to explaining, for example, the stove in *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* or the sword in *Notung*. Certain works with similar, or linking features will be considered together.

1. Box I, plate 162



(Fig. 38) Hanne Darboven. Box I, plate 162, *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*. Dia: Beacon, New York

Presented in landscape format, *plate 162* from the first 'box' consists of fourteen postcards, arranged in a seemingly random, yet orderly, manner. That is, while the postcards themselves are of either landscape or portrait format, they are not necessarily presented 'the right way up.' Indeed the postcard on the far right of the top row is attached face-down, so the stamped and faintly addressed reverse is viewed, hiding the image beneath. The dominant imagery is of landscapes and townscapes, predominantly photographed. There are images, interspersed, of an idealised domestic setting, a floral arrangement with birthday wishes, and illustrated children's cards. The overall impression of calmness and contentedness is curiously disrupted by the arrangement of the cards, however, it is the black-and-white photograph of Adolf Hitler saluting, and looking simultaneously authoritarian and at-ease, that is perhaps most disruptive.

Darboven has cut the stamped corner from the postcard, removed the stamp and re-attached it to the backing paper exposed by the missing corner. What is it, precisely, that this represents? While the 'presence' of Hitler amidst the calm and scenic landscapes appears as a clear reference to the relation between the commonplace and perpetration of evil, what are we to make of Adler's insistence that "it is important to question the merit of assigning such historical, moral and intellectual weight and gravitas to this

imagery..."[458]? Adler qualifies this proposal by highlighting the fact that the cards are "so flimsy, so cheap, so abundant and so impersonally displayed as grids in competition with so much other material."[459] Perhaps a more favorable reading might consider the abundance of, and competition between, such images as *enhancing* the 'intellectual weight and gravitas' of the work. While this reading is acknowledging the mass of visual data in its abbreviated (as relative to other readings presented herein) description and interpretation, it is doing so in the simultaneous acknowledgement of the wonderment at the monumental scale and meticulous detail of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983.*

A return to Gerd de Vries' assessment of Darboven's work exposes a critical appraisal of such work as representationally autonomous, and, thus, important:

> ...Darboven is one of the most politically aware people I know...in the 1970s she began to include photographs, postcards, and other visual elements in her works. These could be – as in *Cultural History* – covers from *Der Spiegel* for an entire year or pages from Werner Stein's *Kulturfahrplan*, basically anything that you could imagine...her art is highly aware, very intense, and extremely artistic in its subject.[460]

My reading is thus more aligned with de Vries' assessment of Darboven's work as critically engaged to the very finest detail, irrespective of proportionality to the greater work. Not only is Darboven's work ethic well documented (her daily routine involved waking to work between 4 a.m. and 11 a.m.), her self-proclaimed maxim – "Art is a mixture between concept and discipline" – makes it implicit that the viewer must be equally committed and engaged to understand her project. de Vries, adopts Darboven's voice with this affirmation:

> "There is this and this and that – now its up to you. I'm not going to dictate how you think. But if you have any sense at all, you'll have to draw the same conclusions as I do. But that's your business."[461]

With this in mind, I would like to consider the postcard of Hitler, with corner missing, as precisely the kind of work that enables Darboven to succeed in a post-philosophical sense. The postcard, a representational gem in the chest of collectables that inhabit

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[458] op. cit., Adler. p. 88.

[459] ibid.

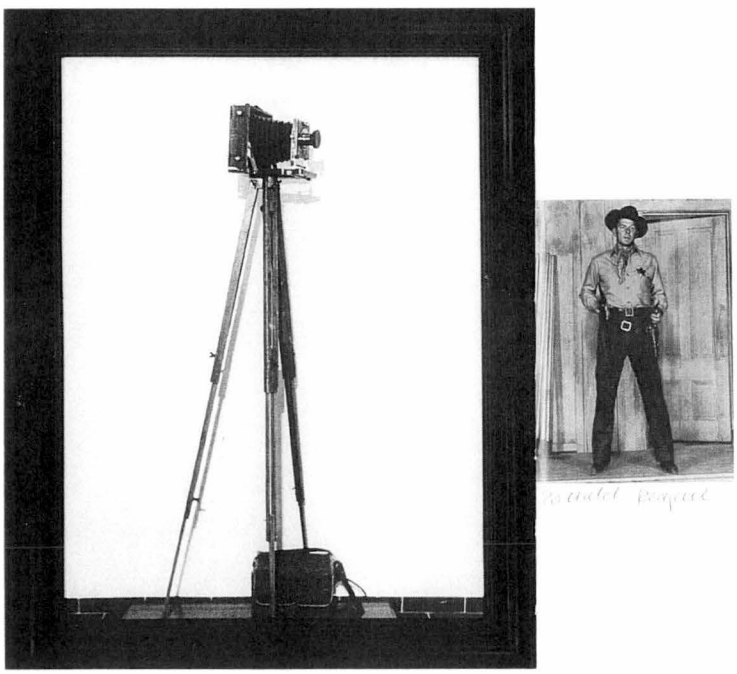
[460] op. cit., Omlin and de Vries. p. 59.

[461] ibid.

Darboven's home and studio has been transformed, with one simple act, into a cryptic representational form. To persist with the notion of *concept and form* as symbiotically engaged, the viewer might, in her attempt to imagine the thought that has taken this form, consider recreating the scenario where Darboven takes the blade to the card.

The first question: Why has Darboven cut the corner? The answer lies, almost certainly, in exposing the stamp to the viewer. Then we might ask: Why is the stamp important? The answer to this question is not so clear, however the ambiguity is itself a critical quality in such work. A postage stamp (note, also that the postcard *above* the Hitler postcard is exposed, stamp-side-up) is a very defined signifier of time and place, and *this* stamp, adorned with a swastika and the words *Deutsches Reich* very clearly marks the card as being in circulation during the Third Reich. It is interesting to note that Darboven has drawn in the border her excision has left missing, a deft aesthetic touch. Amidst the serenity explicit in the other postcards, the clear-cut symbolism, tarnished by human manipulation, renders this fragment of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* far more empowered than Adler wills.

2. Box III, plate 33



(Fig. 39) Hanne Darboven. Box III, plate 33, *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983.* Dia: Beacon, New York

One of the constants in *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* is the thematic, or aesthetic grouping of

these individual panels into clusters, which are either assigned a wall of their own (as was the case in its first installation at the Musee d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1986), or less symmetrically linked, as if mimicking the overhanging monthly blocs of a calendar (as was the case in the Dia: Beacon installation). Either way, the nature of the type of work, and arrangement within each framed panel, determines a particular optical sensation from afar. Even without having experienced the work as an installation, the reproductions clearly show whole segments committed to thematically and aesthetically unified works, some more extensive or repetitive in arrangement than others.

One of the benefits of Darboven's obsessive arrangement is that recourse to a *tone of certainty* (to recall Didi-Huberman) is more secure than might normally be accepted. That is, judging by the aspects of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* available in reproduction, and the clearly grouped panels, it is fairly safe to imagine the wall upon which *Box I, plate 162* resides committed to similarly collaged works than those that are of more randomly sourced materials. However, the image proffered for study here – again marked only according to its box (III) and plate number (33) – is a part of a clearly visible grouping of work all consisting of a two-part collage:

> ...that features reproduced photographs of pop stars, film actors and American political figures – Marlene Dietrich, Marilyn Monroe, Judy Garland and Ronald Reagan, to name a few each portrait is juxtaposed with the same image of a portrait camera on a tripod, and each like ness identified with a handwritten caption in pencil.[462]

From a distance, and in its repetition, the image of the portrait camera is a reflexive reference, not only for the photographing-that-which-photographs dualism it creates, but also for its expression of the power of reproduction it facilitates. Darboven's elusiveness in imparting conceptual clues means that readings of such works have the potential to fall short of those aided by either Beuys's (self) proclaimed intellectual wealth or Kiefer's high-powered and historically-charged symbolism. Nevertheless, her portrayal of celebrity figures, caught in the lens of multiple identical cameras suggests the theoretical force of Benjamin and Adorno nearby. The juxtaposition of camera and celebrity has a representational certainty that commits my deference to the following:

> The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition...An analysis of art in the age of mechanical reproduction must do justice to these

[462] op. cit., Adler. p. 11.

> relationships, for they lead us to an all-important insight: for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependance on ritual. To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics.[463]

Benjamin's words resonate here, particularly in conjunction with the sentiment expressed in this review:

> Darboven's work is deeply political – less, however, in its politically loaded references than in the way they lead us into the problem of representation itself: the desire for the image, for 'writing' to present the self, to narrate life, but at the same time the impossibility for 'writing' to present the self as anything but a representation. Being forever subjugated to its representation by the discourse of the collective other. *Sein und Zeit*, being and time.... Darboven's 'presence' wordlessly traces the passage of its own absence, its own death and unaccountability in language.[464]

The smaller celebrity images positioned to the right of each camera image draw us, again, to Adorno. In this case (almost as if representing the camaraderie formed in the heyday of Frankfurt School productivity and influence) these images elicit Adorno's work in collaboration with Max Horkheimer, in particular the now famous passages from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* – "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." Darboven was almost certainly familiar with this work, and though the series of images being discussed here may not have been direct references to this work (or, for that matter, Benjamin's), they appear as wonderful representations of these concepts:

> Not only are the hit songs, stars and soap operas cyclically recurrent and rigidly variable types, but the specific content of the entertainment itself is derived from them and only appears to change. The details are interchangeable. The short interval sequence which was effective in a hit song, the hero's momentary fall from grace (which he accepts as a good sport), the rough treatment which the beloved gets from the male star, the latter's rugged defence of the spoilt heiress, are, like all

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[463] Walter Benjamin. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" *Illuminations* Trans. Harry Zohn. (New York: Harcourt, 1996) p. 177.

[464] Jean Fisher "Hanne Darboven, Castelli" *Artforum* (Volume 23, no. 4, December, 1984) p 88.

the other details, ready-made clichés to be slotted in anywhere; they never do anything more than fulfill the purpose allotted the in the overall plan.[465]

In plate 33, a sepia-toned photograph of Ronald Reagan (the actor) portrays him standing, dressed in a sheriff's outfit, pistol drawn, aimed at some unknown villain. During the construction of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, Reagan (the president) had come to embody an amalgam of politico-cultural reference even Adorno could not have imagined. The 1,590 panels that make up the wall-mounted aspect of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* each contribute to the expression of concepts and conditions – like those typified by the cultural ramifications of Reagan's presidency – that can be described as *post-philosophical.*

3. *Doors NYC* Box III, plate 53

(Fig. 40) Hanne Darboven. Box III, plate 53, *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983.* Dia: Beacon, New York

Following the grouping of camera/celebrity panels, are 55 frames, each containing 18 small photographs of New York doorways. The photographs were not taken by Darboven; rather, they were taken by "the artist Roy Colmer in Manhattan from 1966

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[465] Theodor W. Adorno. and Max Horkheimer *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Trans. John Cumming. (Continuum: New York, 1991) p. 125.

to 1968, and arranged in a sequence according to a logic of east-west and north-south blocks."[466] Not all of the images are of conventional, household doorways. There are, depicted, shopfronts, elevator grilles and service doors in various states of disrepair. Some of the photographs contain figures entering, exiting or passing-by, while the lack of precision in their execution – evident in their hastily captured, off-kilter imperfection – suggests an affinity with the hurried urbanity of the subject matter. Dan Adler deftly links Darboven's doorway panels to the work of her contemporaries, citing her acquaintance with Mel Bochner as a key aesthetic reference:

> In the spring of 1966, Bochner and Robert Moskowitz made *New York Windows*, a film composed of a non-hierarchical series of images of store-fronts, filmed frontally as a succession of photographic tableaux. These images are, of course, analogous to Colmer's series of doorway images, but they have more significance for Darboven's project than that of simple quotation. In the film, the abrupt transition between shots destroys the illusion of a 'natural' sequence between events.[467]

While her familiarity with this work is assured, I would appeal to the viewer to consider Darboven's doorways as bound to Darboven's project. That is, that *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, in difference to Bochner and Moskowitz's 'tableaux,' is strictly concerned with history, and the microcosmic strata along which it splinters into histor*ies*. Each of these doors represent, like the postcards depicting serene farmlands or tranquil villages, a portal to countless individual histories and memories. However, unlike the postcards, whose imagery acts only to *belie* the presence of good or evil, a door is a barrier that either *encloses*, or *shields from* good or evil. This unknowingness is, for Darboven, a critical condition, one enhanced by her system of repetition. A seemingly arbitrary numerical order is imposed upon the series, overriding the usual addressing system. This effectively disrupts the real system of order and transplants Darboven's, shuffling the images like a deck of cards to add a serendipitous element to the fortunes of the viewer.

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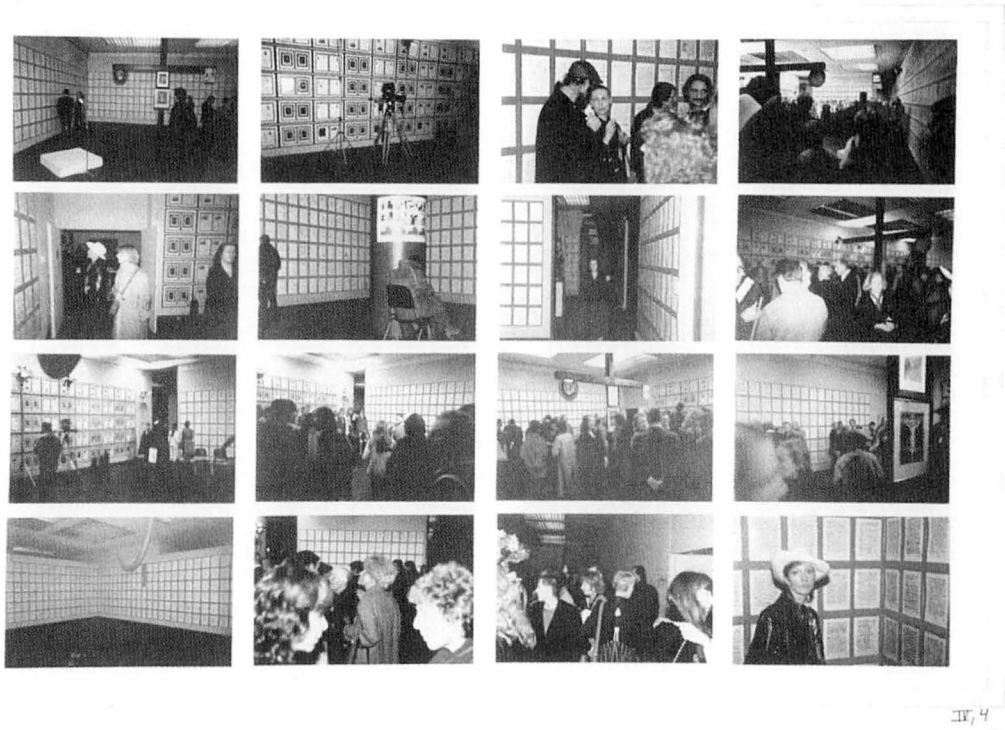
[466] op cit, Adler. p 15.

[467] ibid., p. 17.

4. Box IV, plate 4



(Fig. 41) Hanne Darboven. Box IV, plate 4, *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*. Dia: Beacon, New York

Upon scanning the columns and rows of framed pages that make up the dizzying collaged walls of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, the viewer reaches the image, listed in the limited edition documentation of the work simply as *Box IV, plate 4*, where Darboven has arranged sixteen photographs of the opening night for the first exhibition of the work at the Musèe d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris. The installation of the work in Paris some ten years earlier was quite different; naturally the dimensions and layout of the gallery-space determined this. However, it is interesting to note that, of course, items such as the work in question here were not a part of the original installation, implying Darboven's willingness to build on to the work, incorporating visual triggers to remind the viewer of the temporal shifts inherent in her project.

This self-referential method is particularly reminiscent of Beuys's approach, and is the one quality that is shared by both artists. Beuys's works (particularly *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*) are littered with traces of past works. However there remains deliberation evident in Beuys's references that serve (aided by the mass of critical evaluation) to remind the viewer of the self-mythologisation that he so cautiously constructed. Though he is to be credited with the important development in contemporary art practice that considers the artist as integral to the work of art, re-

evaluation has tainted these efforts somewhat. Whether Darboven has benefited from personal and historical circumstance, or has simply devised a more intelligent approach to this integration of self-into-work is open for speculation. What is certain is that Darboven's intense concern with temporality has created a space in her work for herself and her work as marker-of-time that Beuys was unable to conceive with quite the same sophistication.

In *Box IV, plate 4* we see a scene fairly typical of exhibition openings; well-dressed patrons mingling, clutching their obligatory glasses of wine, posing before the works, and so on. Darboven herself can be seen in a photograph (top row, second from right), chatting; a more youthful figure than the one present at Dia: Beacon. This snapshot of Darboven, glimpses of the fashion of the day, and even the slightly opaque quality of the imagery evoke the passage of time in the way that only such flippantly crafted snapshots can. If (to again cite Lawrence Weiner) Darboven's work *is what it is*, then we are confronted by the problem of knowing precisely what this images *are*, and what they represent. While the question of perception and perspective in the study of *Notung* lead to the question of subjectivity, the discourse (here we might have recourse to the term *deconstruction*) surrounding the medium of photography, in particular analyses undertaken by theorists like Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag, draw the viewer to reconsider, if not outright dismiss, Weiner's maxim. For instance, the aesthetic qualities that determine the faux amateur charm of the photographs in *Box IV, plate 4*, are, when reconstituted within the structure of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, transformed into critical tools when considered along Barthesian lines. The cognitive shift from German to French theory is often determined more by literary flourish, however Barthes' writing on photography is valuable in relation to Darboven's work for its dissection of the qualities of photographs like those in *Box IV, plate 4*. Barthes distinction between the *denoted* message and the *connoted* message in the 'imitative' arts is challenged by the photographic image, in particular the "press photograph."[468] While the images in *Box IV, plate 4* are not strictly 'press photographs,' they possess the denotational qualities Barthes outlines:

> The photograph professing to be a mechanical analogue of reality, its first-order message in some sort completely fills its substance and leaves no place for the development of a second-order

[468] "...'imitative' arts comprise two messages: a *denoted* message, which is the *analogon* itself, and a *connoted* message, which is the manner in which the society to a certain extent communicates what it thinks of it This duality of messages is evident in all reproductions other than photographic ones." Roland Barthes *Image-Music-Text* Trans Stephen Heath. (New York. Hill and Wang, 1978) p. 56

> message. Of all the structures of information, the photograph appears as the only one that is exclusively constituted and occupied by a 'denoted' message, a message which totally exhausts its mode of existence. In front of a photograph, the feeling of 'denotation'...is so great that the description of a photograph is literally impossible...to describe is thus not simply to be imprecise or incomplete, it is to change structures, to signify something different from what is shown.[469]

While Barthes works towards his demarcation of denotation in image and text, we may digress so as to consider the nature of Darboven's representation. Treating the photographs in *Box IV, plate 4* as 'analogue of reality,' yet set within the confines of an artwork, Darboven conflates the experience of being without connotative or 'second order' messages on the one hand, and being completely subsumed by conceptual structures. That we might turn from Benjamin to Barthes with such authority is a salute to the conceptual force of Darboven's work, and to the importance of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* as representative of a post-philosophical landscape.

5. Box V, plate 210

(Fig. 42) Hanne Darboven. Box V, plate 210, *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983.* Dia: Beacon, New York

There is little controversy in cautious reference to Joseph Beuys in any monograph

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[469] ibid.

concerning post-war German art or artists due to his overwhelming presence. During the course of this study of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, Beuys's legacy has been presented as pivotal to appreciating aspects of her practice. Whether it is the museum-like qualities of the multi-room installation or the self-referential signals that emanate from its walls, *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* adopts Beuysian devices. However, when Darboven herself posits an image of Beuys amidst the multitude of panels, we are confronted by the artist's own representation of his legacy.

There is no shortage of reference by artists, in their art, to Beuys. While stylistically and aesthetically varied, they are invariably concerned with his legacy. Anselm Kiefer's inscription of Beuys's name on his sombre masterpiece *Deutschlands Geisteshelden (Germany's Spiritual Heroes)* (Fig. 43) is thematically and stylistically differentiated from renderings like Jörg Immendorf's (Fig. 44) tragi-comic figure of Beuys (as 'Fruit Man' buried beneath a mound of apples[470]) or Martin Kippenberger's peculiar *homage* – a rendering of Beuys as his own mother (Fig. 45).

(Fig. 43) Anselm Kiefer. *Deutschlands Geisteshelden (Germany's Spiritual Heroes)* (1973)
Oil and charcoal on burlap, mounted on canvas. 307 x 682 cm. The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica.

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[470] This work appears in Immendorf's first major exhibtion in the United States, and is titled, in clear reference to Beuys: *Ich wollte Kunstler werden (I Wanted to Become an Artist)*. A review cites "Immendorff's preoccupation with the politics of space… and the belief that collectivism – and the social and architectural interventions that facilitate it – might activate art's revolutionary potential…As a student at the Staatliche Kunstakademie Dusseldorf in the late '60s, Immendorff, influenced by his teacher Joseph Beuys, staged numerous politically charged performances and Fluxus-like actions that critiqued post-war German society." Isabelle Graw "Jorg Immendorff: Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin" *ArtForum* (January, 2006) p. 145.

(Fig. 44) Jörg Immendorf. *Fruchtmann* (1965) Acrylic on canvas. 100 x 100 cm.
From "I Wanted to Become an Artist" Moore College of Art and Design, Philadelphia.

(Fig. 45) Martin Kippenberger *Die Mutter von Joseph Beuys* (*The Mother of Joseph Beuys*) (1984)
Oil on canvas, 160 x 133cm. Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne.

As this thesis has demonstrated, researching an artist's relationship with their subject matter and/or the conceptual underpinnings of their practice provides immeasurable assistance to determining meaning in a work of art. While there are a number of complex sub-plots running beneath the surface of their creation, both works by Kiefer and Immendorf are nevertheless clear representations of Beuys's legacy to them, as former students at the Staatliche Kunstakademie in Dusseldorf and, thus, the next generation of German citizens and artists. Kippenberger, on the other hand, is another generation removed, and the irreverence typical of his work represents his growing distance from the both original direction of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and Beuys's influence. The lack of vibrancy in both colour and tone in his portrayal of Beuys's mother is at once recognition of Beuys's origin and the contrast to Kippenberger's own flamboyantly bohemian lifestyle and practice.[471]

As has become evident, external factors complicate any reading of Darboven's work. Perhaps most prominent among these is her disengagement with the notion of art-practice and her systematic avoidance of emotive connotation. Furthermore, within the frame that encloses the stoney-faced portrait of Beuys, the juxtapositioning of images of the Ayatollah Khomeini; postcards depicting floral arrangements, St Peter's Cathedral in Hamburg, indefinable rural buildings and Pompeii; and drawn studies of water pouring from an urn, compound the interpretive challenge. Adler resurrects Benjamin to explain Darboven's method:

> Darboven's presentational strategy...has affinities with Benjamin's notion of the dialectical image or constellation. As Susan Buck-Morss has discussed, one may encounter such a constellation in which tainted and fossilized imagery and objects – materials literally left on the side of the road by linear and institutional histories – are combined in a manner that allows each element to retain some degree of empirical specificity, creating gaps between the images...and referents...and thus establishing the potential for a 'crossing of semantic switches' or a 'rubbing against thought with a friction that generates cognitive sparks, illuminating the reader's own life-world.[472]

The portrait of Beuys adorns the cover of the Novemeber 5, 1979 edition of *Der Spiegel* that propelled him – in much the same fashion as Jackson Pollock's appearance in *Life*

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[471] Kippenberger was renowned for his decadent lifestyle and ongoing struggle with alcoholism. He died of liver disease, in 1996, aged 44.

[472] op cit., Adler. p. 15

magazine[473] – to a stardom unheralded in German art history. Darboven has simply removed the cover, whole, and attached it neatly to the upper left hand part of the panel. Likewise, she has removed the cover of the following week's edition (November 12, 1979) and placed it to the right of the Beuys cover. This serves as an interesting interpretive test, one that Darboven no doubt consciously employed. That the viewer is confronted by two images of figure-heads, or one might even say (clearly of Ayatollah Khomeini, tentatively of Beuys) spiritual leaders, suggests that Darboven is likening Beuys's hold over German art to the fanaticism Western media frequently portrayed the Ayatollah conjuring in Iran. That the caption beneath Beuys's portrait reads "Der Größte: Weltruhm für einen Scharlatan?" ("The Greatest: World fame for a charlatan?") and the caption beneath Khomeini reads "Chaos im Iran: Fanatiker Chomeini" ("Chaos in Iran: Khomeini the fanatic") adds to this suggestive reading. Charlatanism and fanaticism may be quite different conditions, however they both suggest some level of mental instability. While this might *seem* like the most obvious reading, taking heed of Darboven's obsession with the marking of time is a reminder that all may not be as it *seems*. Is it possible that Darboven is simply presenting successive editions of *Der Spiegel* as a representation of this temporal location? Naturally, there is a poignancy to her choice of images, yet it is a reminder to the viewer that too hasty a reading might distract from less obvious, but perhaps more important, features. While very significant when viewing Darboven's work, this rule must surely apply to all studies.

The spatial dominance of these two items certainly distracts the viewer from the postcards and drawings arranged around them. Again, the illustration of the floral arrangement adorning the postcard immediately to the right of the sabre-wielding Ayatollah appears to be an aesthetic foil to the imposing figure and his backdrop of a burning American flag. The spires of St Peter's Cathedral in Hamburg dominate a second postcard; the clear skies and calm urbanity further impressing a civilised and Christian calm in the face of the Shi'ah fanaticism. Darboven's intellect and political astuteness render this reading overly simplistic. Again, it is more likely an ironic documentation of the dominant Western perception of both Islam and itself. The sepia-toned postcard laid

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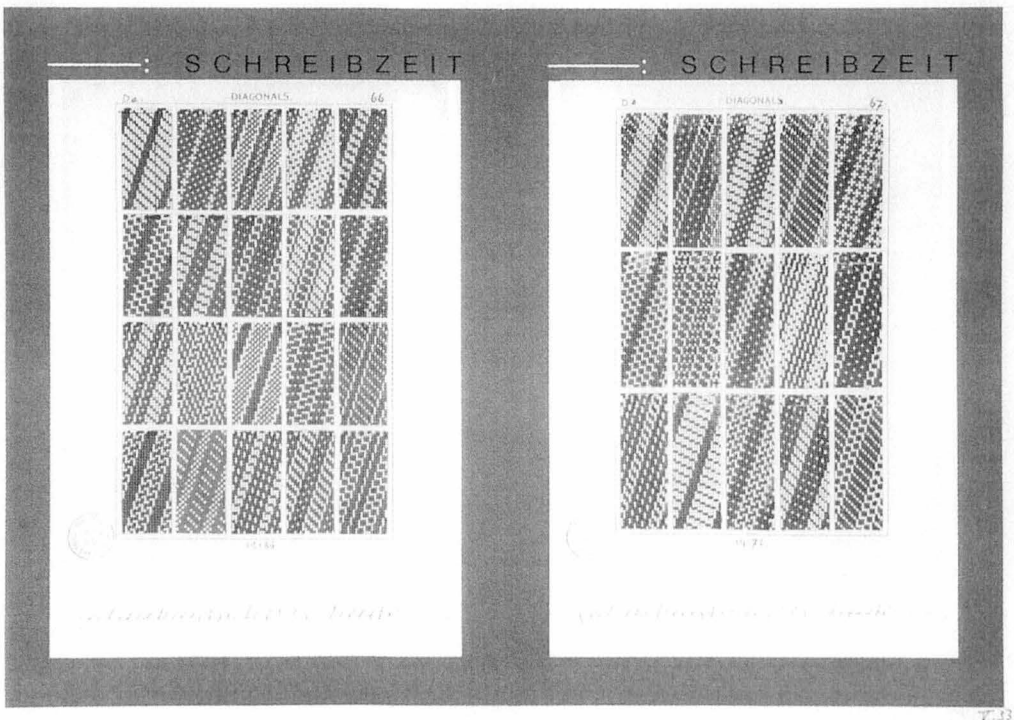
[473] In 1949, a four-page photographic essay on Pollock in *Life* magazine posed the question: "Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?" This article sealed Pollock's unprecedented national and international fame Dorothy Sieberling (uncredited) "Jackson Pollock: Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?" *Life* (August 8, 1949) pp. 42-46

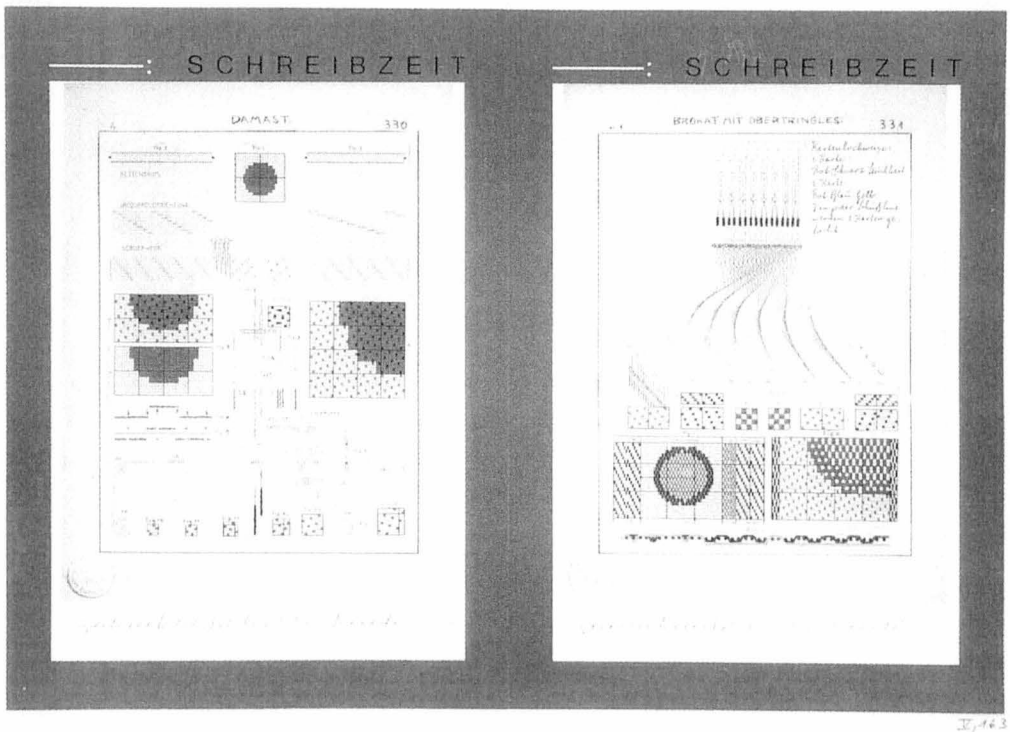
on its side to the left of the Hamburg city-scape is, unfortunately, unclear in the reproduction, however its tone is suggestive of pre-war calm and tradition, both aspects of German culture which, by 1979, were very distant memories. The postcard from Pompeii, though somewhat incongruous, is nevertheless steeped in symbolism. As a symbol of the fragility of civilisation against the forces of nature, Pompeii is unmatched. However tempted one might be to read this as a metaphor for German culture, it is unlikely that Darboven has chosen this postcard for this purpose, or at least for this purpose alone. Anyone familiar with the countless figures extracted from the compacted ash – fixed in their death as the sculptural forms displayed as grotesquely voyeuristic museum pieces – knows that Pompeii has become a landmark case-study for this capturing of time. While Darboven uses photographs of gallery-goers in their fashionable attire as a marker of a moment then immediately lost, the figures of Pompeii, caught in their final moments of anguish, are exceptional. Further marking this panel as temporally bound to 1979 is that this year marked a special anniversary for the victims of Pompeii; the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius that destroyed the city occurred in the year 79.

Finally, on a barely decipherable card in the bottom-left corner of the arrangement, we have scrawlings of text, completely undistinguishable in reproduction apart from one, very distinct signature: Joseph Beuys. The most interesting feature of this article is the confused regard Darboven has for this most prized item. Surely, the signature of 'The Greatest' is a treasure that should be kept, safely? Or should it be framed and displayed as an acknowledgement of this same greatness? In the context of the collage Darboven confuses the meaning, perhaps deliberately. Either way, it is granted a unique, and typically Darbovenian, semantic status.

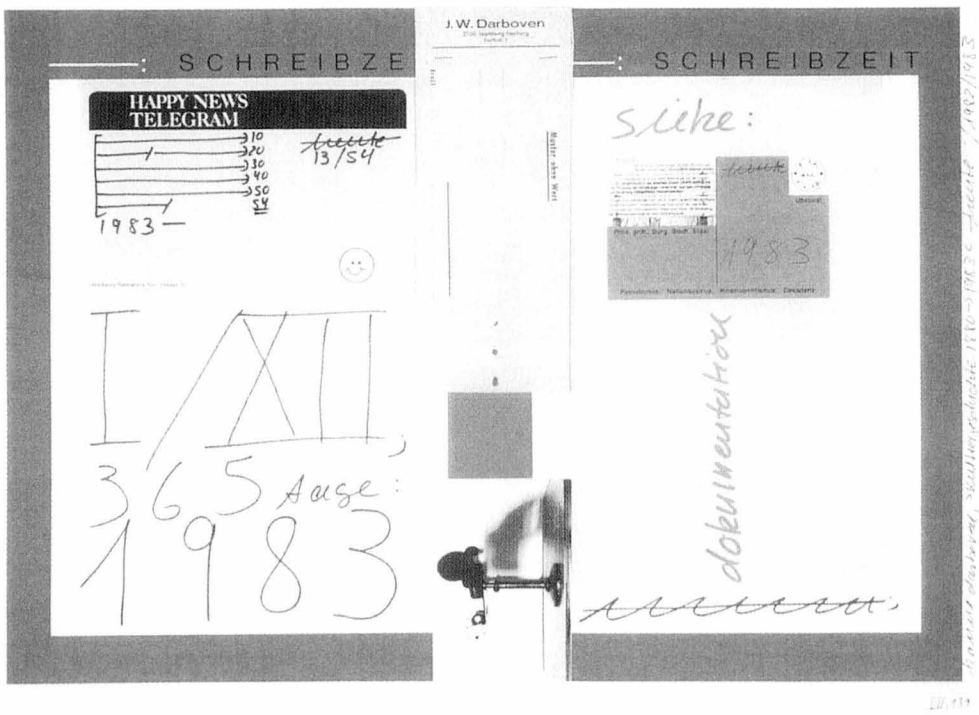
6. Box V, plate 33; Box V plate 163; Box VII, plate 139



(Fig. 46) Hanne Darboven. Box V, plate 33, *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983.* Dia: Beacon, New York



(Fig. 47) Hanne Darboven. Box V, plate 163, *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983.* Dia: Beacon, New York



(Fig. 48) Hanne Darboven. Box VII, plate 139, *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983.* Dia: Beacon, New York

It should be immediately clear to the viewer why these three works have been grouped together under one heading. Visually, it is apparent that they all share a red border inscribed with the word *SCHREIBZEIT.* The somewhat arbitrary placement of these words on the visually dominant red-framed multiples belies their significance, as explained here by Klaus Honnef:

> The word *Schreibzeit* ("time of writing") appears custom-printed on many of Darboven's pages. It first appeared as the title of a 3200-page work in 1979. No concept could more tangibly explain what Hanne Darboven aesthetically strives for and artistically realizes, time of writing in chains of words and numbers; "write -- to compute -- compute -- to write" (Darboven), object, goal, and means of the whole work."[474]

This textual framing of her practice, engraved upon the stark red framing of these panels, has the effect of delineation, as each of these works possess aesthetic qualities that are, while typical of Darboven's earlier system of calculations, at odds with the (albeit orderly) irregularity of the other works on paper discussed. In the montage of photographs seen

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[474] Honnef, Klaus. "Art Encyclopedia of Culture: Klaus Honnef on Hanne Darboven." *Hanne Darboven: Primitive Zeit/ Uhrzeit. (Primitive Time/ Clock Time)* (Philadephia: Goldie Paley Gallery, Moore College of Art) p. 8.

in *Box IV, plate 4* (taken at the opening of the Paris installation) we can see aspects of the original installation that illustrate the dominance of this part of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983.* Indeed, so dominant is the arrangement that from a distance it simulates – in macroscopy – the very systems and grids that fascinate Darboven in minute detail.

The first of these images presented here (according to the numerical ordering of the boxes and plates), *Box V, plate 33*, is one of a large series based on "diagrams for textile weaving that Darboven retrieved from the Argosy Book Store in New York."[475] Critical readings of these works has varied from Dan Adler's quasi-Marxian interpretation:

> Although Darboven obviously and consistently wishes to make reference to systems of classification and to mechanisms of industrial production, she seems intent on denying their logic. However scientific and mathematically sophisticated they are in appearance, Darboven's computations are ultimately inconclusive...[476]

to that proposed by Vivian Bobka, who is responsible for the Dia Art Foundation's online Darboven resource, and who, according to Adler, considers these works as:

> ...appear[ing] to somehow exceed their projected ends but never meet them. The artist habitually disrespects the parameters of subgroups within all of her sequential arrangements. For Darboven, there is never simply one series at work, but rather an entangling of sequences and overlaid patterns – the number of the page, the number of the grid, the date, the handwritten number, the roman numeral.[477]

This work is also the closest in style and concept to the work of her oft-cited peers LeWitt and Hesse. Highlighting the difficulties the researcher encounters when studying a work that is neither available for viewing nor extensively dissected in text, the unavailability of any data concerning the date of production of these works means that any interpretation must remain bound only to a conceptual reading. One might guess, with certain accuracy, that just as the pages of textile patterns are from her New York residency, so too the scrap-booked, indexical fragments that make up the 'inner workings' of Darboven's *Schreibzeit* pages. If so, there is an affinity with the type of allegorical practice explained here by Craig Owens:

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[475] op. cit., Adler p 23

[476] ibid., p. 24.

[477] ibid.

> ...it is the 'common practice' of allegory 'to pile up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea of a goal.' This method of construction led Angus Fletcher to liken allegorical structure to obsessional neurosis; and the obsessiveness of the works of Sol LeWitt, say, or Hanne Darboven suggests that they too may fall within the compass of the allegorical. Here we encounter yet a third link between allegory and contemporary art: in strategies of accumulation, the paratactic work composed by the simple placement of 'one thing after another'. .One paradigm for the allegorical work is the mathematical progression...Allegory concerns itself, then, with the projection – either spatial or temporal or both – of structure as sequence; the result, however, is not dynamic, but static, ritualistic, repetitive. It is thus the epitome of counter-narrative, for it arrests narrative in place...[478]

The deliberate disjunction of narrative and personal history is not only symbolic for Germany and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, but for explaining the importance of art in managing those elements of being that cannot be represented in a linear form. Despite producing a sensation of linearity, by 'denying the logic' of these sequences, Darboven's scattered history rears dizzyingly from the walls. Darboven's 'arresting of narrative' is then confirmed by her fractured montage. Ultimately, these works – in particular the textile pattern series – remind the viewer of the theme of discipline and labour woven through *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*. That Darboven manages to produce this explicitly, by way of subtle permeation of implicit and suggestive signals is a mark of her sophistication as an artist and thinker:

> Darboven's work is less a documentation or 'transcription' of time than a documentation of labor. Although labor *takes* time, we can only see the products of her labor and not a manifestation of Time. Her marks were made according the additions of the numbers which *represent* dates which in turn represent Time. "I inscribe, but I describe nothing."...She is interested in the numbers and not their representations, descriptions, or personifications.[479]

The final work reviewed here is the work most clearly touched by Darboven's hand; her writing appears, large and determined, and, with the exception of her ever-present cursive script – *uuuuu* – all of the words and numerical references are easily distinguishable. Their meaning, particularly in relation to each other, is, on the other hand, less clear.

On a 'Happy News Telegram' we are presented with a graph-like marking, interrupted at approximate reference points of 13 and 54, in accordance with the written fraction

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[478] Craig Owens. "The Allegorical Impulse Towards a Theory of Postmodernism" *October* 12 (Spring, 1980) p. 73.

[479] op cit., Colosi.

13/54. Above this figure, Darboven has written *heute*[480] (today). The immediate reading is that today is, indeed, the 13th of 54. The relevance to the telegram or 'happy news' is immediately unknown. Other 'clues' on the page fail to shed any light on the mysterious numerical proposition. The year, 1983, is written three times. The figure of 365 must surely represent the days of that year, and the roman numerals I/XII suggest January, as the first of the twelve months. While the words *Auge* (eye), *siehe* (see, look) and *dokumentation* (documentation) appear haphazardly positioned on the pages, their positional relation to other items, such as another of Darboven's cut and reconstructed postcards, impart subtle meaning. Overlaid is a page taken from an order form belonging to her father's coffee importing firm. This intertwining of personal history and documentation amidst the curious clutter of the collage enriches the sense, if not our knowledge, of Darboven's affinity with this work and it's representational importance. This same sense is clearly what inspired Bobka to use this passage from Flaubert to complement the visual:

> They copy papers haphazardly, everything they find, tobacco pouches, old newspapers, posters, torn books...Then, they feel the need for a taxonomy. They make tables, antithetical oppositions such as "crimes of the kings and crimes of the people" – blessings of religion, crimes of religion. Beauties of history, etc.; sometimes, however, they have real problems putting each thing in its proper place and suffer great anxieties about it.
> – Onward! enough speculation! Keep on copying! The page must be filled. Everything is equal, the good and the evil. The farcical and the sublime – the beautiful and the ugly – the insignificant and the typical, they all become an exaltation of the statistical. There is nothing but facts – and phenomena.
> Final bliss.[481]

Presented with Darboven's taxonomy, the viewer's expectations are heightened by the comprehensiveness suggested by its quantity, only to be lowered by its apparent disorder. With patience, the viewer may subsume the anxiety inherent in Darboven's cryptic collage and come to the realisation that although every fragment affects "a shifting

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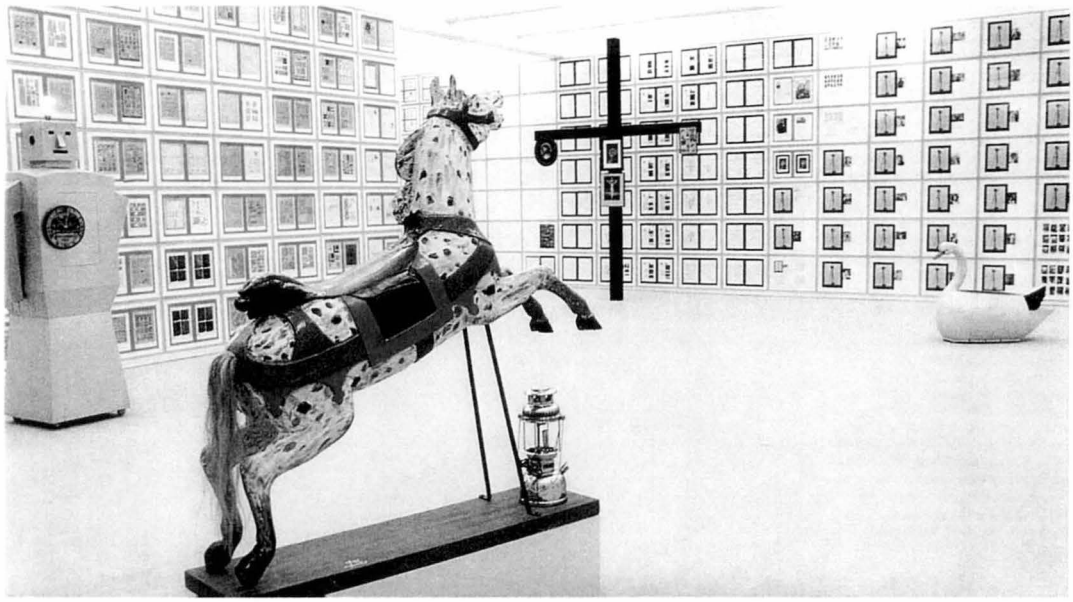
[480] "Time. .cannot be regained.. the changing dates are a record and a reminder of time passing Irrevocably, tomorrow will turn into today, or '*heute,*' which Darboven will write as a word on the page only to cross it out, signifying time spent." Coosje van Bruggen "Today Crossed Out" *Artforum* (Volume 26, no. 5, January, 1988) p. 71

[481] One of Gustave Flaubert's possible endings for his novel *Bouvard and Pécuchet* (1881), as cited by Douglas Crimp "On the Museum's Ruins" op. cit., Foster. p 48.

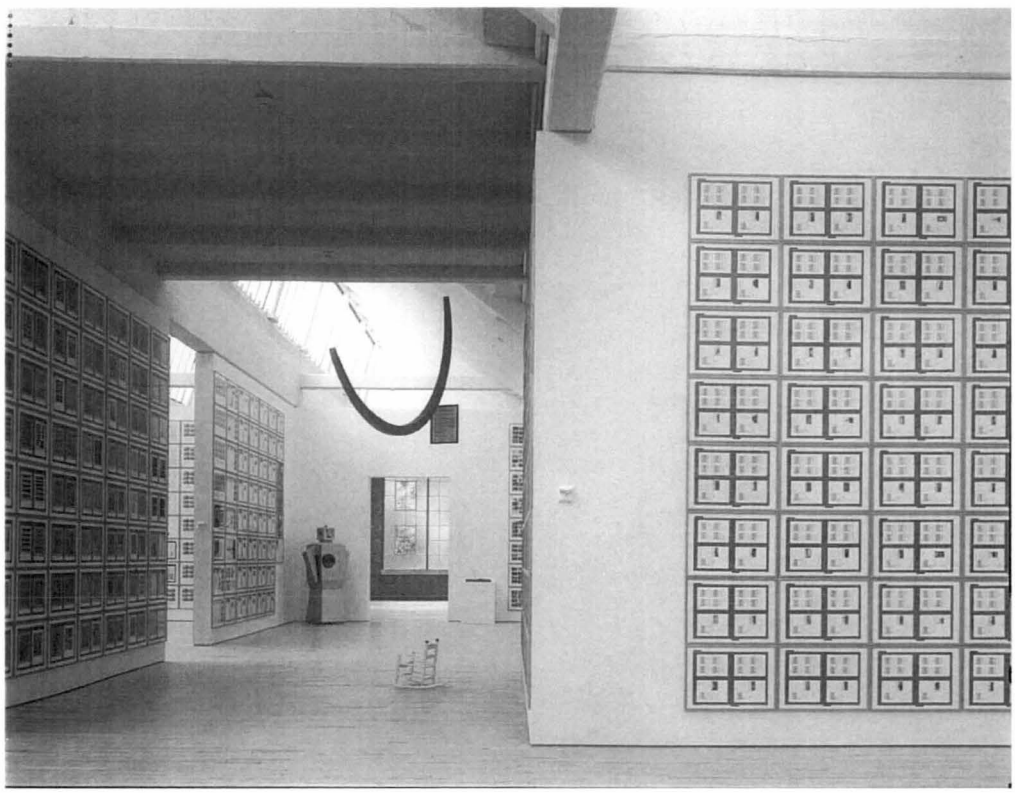
balance, a synthesis of private record and social memory,"[482] the macrocosmic aesthetic of discipline and labour in *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* denotes her post-philosophical presence.

[482] G. Garrels "Hanne Darboven" *Photography in Contemporary German Art: 1960 to the Present* (Minneapolis Walker Art Center, 1992) p. 43.

3.3.4 The sculptural objects



(Fig. 49) Hanne Darboven. (detail) *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983.*
Installation, mixed media. Dia: Beacon, New York



(Fig. 50) Hanne Darboven. (detail) *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983.*
Installation, mixed media. Dia: Beacon, New York

To best understand the role sculptural objects play in *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, the viewer might imagine the installation *without* these objects. The most obvious effect the nineteen sculptural elements of the installation impart is an upsetting of the graphic order of the wall-mounted works. They appear to simulate museum pieces, each infused with historical curiosity and personal significance. This significance may appeal first and foremost to Darboven, however commonality of experience or feeling – empathy – plays a vital role. Memory jostles with history for pre-eminence in this sculptural forum; without the symmetry and system of Darboven's disciplined paper-works, the sculptural elements disturb the aesthetic of documented certainty critical to the historical process. This section is a continuation of the reading of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* as a sum of its parts, nevertheless, it concurs with Adler's commitment to granting these objects "special semantic status."[483]

Once more it should be noted that as the readings herein are taken from the limited reproductions available, they are without any foundation in the aesthetic experience of viewing the installation *in situ*. I must reiterate that an important subtext to the thesis' main claim is that there needs to be a methodological consideration of the experience of viewing art. As a major work of twentieth century conceptual art that may not, in the near future, be reinstalled, *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* acts as an ideal case study for the experience of understanding art *via* reproduction. This is no more complicated than in the experience of three-dimensional works of art and/or installation works, as the viewer's spatio-temporal relationship with the work is so infinitely and subtly varied. This section will take an imagined 'critical wander' among the sculptural elements.

The reproductions present such a variety of perspectives of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, that it is impossible to determine any starting point for this exercise. It is fair to say that, while the arrangement of the works is important to Darboven, the viewer should feel free to explore the work as she or he pleases. Just as *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964* was deliberate in its deconstruction of spatio-temporality, so too is *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*. The viewer may feel drawn to certain works, dependent on the sensation a certain object might elicit. This memorial relativism is a key to engaging with the work, and the sculptural elements are each endowed with this potential. Perhaps the most immediately striking item is the large cross.

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[483] op. cit., Adler p. 6.

While the meaning attached to religious symbolism in art might have changed during the course of the last two centuries, its poignancy and force remains. As evident in the work by both Beuys and Kiefer, Christianity (and its associated symbolism) has become a force in the representation and understanding of German history. Whether it provokes discourse surrounding the complicity of Church and State during the Nazi era, or is bound with mythology and the *Blut und Boden* ideology to craft a theologically confounded religious nationalism, the role of the Christian churches in Germany remains symbolically potent. Thus, Darboven's use of a Christian cross in *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* is unsurprising in its presence alone. What is of interest is the utilisation of the cross as a "signpost."[484] The juxtapositional iconoclasm evident throughout *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* is explicit here:

> In the same gallery as the robot and the swan stands a 12½-foot-tall cross, with a photograph of a man in Nazi uniform, two images of Jesus and an aged illustration of a smartly dressed schoolgirl attached to it.[485]

From Darboven's limited utterances and deliberate ambiguity, it is impossible to accurately determine the significance of the positioning of the images on the cross. Indeed, the pictorial references to Jesus – one a common, black-and-white devotional portrait, the other a time-faded crucifixion image – appear as oddities despite (or, precisely, *due* to) the context. That Darboven so readily creates ambiguity with her deliberate placement of thematically or conceptually discordant objects side-by-side, it is unusual to see so clear a link between items. The viewer might question the importance of the positioning of the images on the cross; the crucifixion image is approximately aligned to the place on the cross where Jesus' torso would have rested, indicating some physical point of reference, perhaps to the heart. Consider, then, the Nazi soldier's head, placed where the crucified Jesus' head would rest according to the traditional portrayal of the crucifixion, and the illustration of the schoolgirl, all contributing to an amalgam of blasphemy and ambiguity that enlivens the space.

This space is shared by three other items: a primitively modelled robot, a propped, rearing rocking-horse and a wooden, swan-shaped seat from a carnival ride. The innocence associated with these objects is sapped to some extent by Darboven's memorial aesthetic. Long untouched and disused, the objects in this setting project a

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[484] ibid p. 9.

[485] ibid.

certain futility. The robot's clumsily constructed form, topped with an illuminated bulb and symmetrically nonplussed expression is (while at odds with the animation Darboven has attempted to present in the form of the rocking-horse) somewhat frivolous, a choice that one does not immediately associate with Darboven's typically meticulous technique. The wooden, swan-shaped seat is, at least, suggestive in its emptiness. However, it too imparts a suspicious simplicity. Subtle touches suggest deeper meaning, particularly when the viewer is (as this thesis deems she or he must be) armed with historical and/or cultural points of reference. Take, for instance, the lamp that sits, extinguished, at the feet of the rearing horse. Just as Joseph Beuys made a point of presenting mechanical items in an unusable or non-functioning state, so too, we might note Darboven's use of an object whose function is illumination, in a disused, non-functional state. What the viewer makes of such readings is subjective, however having an eye for such things serves to enhance the intellectual experience of viewing such work. The overarching sense of absence and impotence is of primary importance. Elsewhere, other elements fulfil their aesthetic role with these qualities. From the tiny, white child's rocking chair to the bare advertising pillar (common in public spaces throughout Europe), this absence – absence of the child, absence of the civilian – imbues the installation with the discomfort of memorials of loss. It is not only physical absence that Darboven channels; in the forms of the two figures on plinths – a doctor and a baker – the viewer is confronted with an absence of emotion and intellect. This too has a rather disconcerting effect, not unlike that culturally channelled phobia of puppets.

Elsewhere Darboven trades disconcertion for farce, particularly with the two shop-front mannequins rendered ludicrous in their matching jogging attire. While the female mannequin gazes sadly into the distance, the male figure – resplendent with Bismarckian hair and moustache – appears somewhat imbecilic in this same outfit, his docile eyes focussed dimly on her lugubriously posed form. However, any comedic qualities this couple might possess in isolation are diffused in juxtaposition. Against the backdrop of Darboven's disciplined production, their stance impresses only disempowerment. This sensation is evident in all of the elements that portray the human form, be they the African fetish (*Regenmacher* or 'rain-maker') or the tiny model of the archer, suspended in the motion of shooting.

This symbolic disempowerment permeates the sculptural field of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, empowering what otherwise might appear absurd calculations and arrangements

elsewhere. Just as the cross is transformed into a signpost, so too are other religious symbols situated so as to become transmogrified; a crescent suspended alongside a sheet of music in one room ("problematis[ing] the singular meaning to the 'moon' religious or otherwise."[486]), a prayer-bell placed down, clapper muted, in another. The disjuncture of symbol from meaning, or object from function acts to enhance the actuality of Darboven's work: the futility and failings of these end-products highlight the means of the creative production.

There are some objects, presented as sculptural elements, which challenge this reading. Darboven's placement of the Book of Proverbs, pages open, atop a plinth, is, while suggestive of impotence outside the confines of a religious institution, more likely chosen for alternative reasons:

> The book has traditionally been interpreted by theologians as a pedagogical resource for teaching young people how to live under God; appropriately for Darboven, its heterogeneous structure reads as a hodgepodge of sayings that are not arranged to a coherent logic.[487]

Perhaps this is Darboven's way of representing religion as an invalid pedagogical tool, validating her own discipline in opposition. The randomness of these elements makes them very difficult to read with any certainty, however the presence of these more ideologically defined items counters this uncertainty somewhat, prompting a more defined conclusion to this reading. In addition to Darboven's sacrilegious presentations of religious symbols and texts throughout *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, she delivers a stark political symbolism, too.

The most definitive objects are busts of two of modern Germany's most recognisable and influential political leaders – Chancellors Otto von Bismarck and Konrad Adenauer. Bismarck's historical significance was assured when he became Germany's first Chancellor upon the nation's unification in 1871. Bismarck's credentials as a statesman were already recognised in his roles preceding his Chancellorship – as Minister-President of Prussia, then Chancellor of the North German Confederation – however his nineteen-year reign remains unparalleled. Darboven's decision to include Bismarck's bust as a sculptural element of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* is perhaps determined by his presence as

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[486] ibid. p. 14

[487] ibid. p 47

Chancellor in 1880.

Bismarck's legacy is the subject of ongoing debate, as evidenced by the following explication by Kenneth Barkin's essay "Bismarck in a Postmodern World." However, Barkin points out that the 'Iron Chancellor' reached the peak of his powers and fortune around the same time Darboven marks her project's beginning:

> Was Bismarck responsible for the later debacle of Imperial Germany? Who is responsible for the annexation of Alsace Lorraine? Was Bismarck a man of the *ancien regime* or a revolutionary? Ironically, Engelberg, writing when Erbe und Tradition were the fashion in the former DDR, is the most positive in his assessment of Bismarck. Pflanze sees a strict separation between a highly successful foreign policy and a disastrous domestic policy. Gall's division is chronological. He views Bismarck as a progressive force until 1879, and, thereafter, a desperate figure, seeking to freeze his enviable accomplishments and stem any further historical development.[488]

Whether or not Darboven has used Bismarck's bust as a representation of this historical legacy remains speculative, however it is without doubt that Darboven's impressions of Bismarck would have been informed by her years of living in Hamburg, home to the most visible memorial of his rule. The city's Bismarck memorial, completed in 1906 is "considered to be one of the greatest expressions of Imperial Germany's Bismarck cult and an important development in the history of German memorial art."[489] Evidence of the receding 'cult of Bismarck' can be seen in its neglect, and the public opposition to its overbearing presence:

> On 2 June 1991, Professor Rolf Liebermann, then director of Hamburg's opera, made a dramatic statement to a television audience. Eighty-five years to the day after its dedication, he denounced the city's memorial to Otto von Bismarck as 'hideous' and the 'height of ignominy' He recommended it be blown up, all thirty-five metres and 650,000 kilograms of it. No one took Liebermann up on his suggestion, but by this time, the monument was no stranger to neglect and even abuse. Today, the memorial that was once an unmistakable symbol of Hamburg, that was once referred to as the German Statue of Liberty, is so well hidden by trees that many people familiar with Hamburg are unfamiliar with it. Rubbish and empty alcohol bottles have replaced the wreaths once placed at its feet, and it has become a favourite canvas for graffiti artists. If not a victim of explosives, it has become a victim of German history.

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[488] Kenneth Barkin. "Bismarck in a Postmodern World" *German Studies Review* (Volume 18, no. 2, May, 1995) p 243

[489] Mark A. Russell. "The Building of Hamburg's Bismarck Memorial, 1898-1906" *The Historical Journal* (Volume 43, no. 1, March, 2000) p 133.

Darboven's Bismarck thus becomes a discursive trigger, unleashing a range of historical and ideological reference. What then, should the viewer make of Darboven's choice of Adenauer as a political bookend to this representation? Most immediately, Adenauer, as Chancellor of the then (1949) newly divided Germany, represented more clearly than any figure, the hugely demoralising shift of fortune that had occurred since Bismarck. Not only was he at odds with Bismarck's personal standing and ethos ("...Adenauer had a fanatical hatred of Prussia and *Junkertum.* He prided himself on being a citizen, not an aristocrat."[490]), he presided over a reconstruction of the shattered German state that Bismarck had been largely responsible for constructing. Consider this brief explication of Adenauer's Chancellorship:

> On September 15, 1949, Adenauer was inaugurated Chancellor of the newly created Federal Republic of Germany, a post he was to assume, incredibly, at the age of 73, and to hold longer than any Chancellor since Bismarck...the country was destroyed, devastated, crushed in the most comprehensive sense of these words. Its cities were in ruins, its factories a shambles, its transportation network punctured at a thousand vital points, its agriculture in disarray...there was no real administration, no real economy, no real education, no real courts, poor medical facilities, poor housing and few building supplies.[491]

Then, consider this statement from Darboven:

> I built up something by having disturbed something: destruction becomes construction. Action interrupts contemplation, as the means of accepting something among many given alternatives, for accepting nothing becomes chaos. A system becomes necessary...I like the least pretentious and most humble means, for my ideas depend on themselves and not upon material; it is the very nature of ideas to be non-materialistic. Many variations exist in my work. There is consistent flexibility and changeability, evidencing the relentless flux of events.[492]

From this statement, Darboven appears to share with Adenauer a no-nonsense approach to her work, albeit directed toward a less critical task. Her emphasis on 'construction from destruction;' 'action over contemplation' and the 'system' as a means controlling 'chaos' – all points to an implied reverence of Adenauer's method. He even shares Darboven's verbal circumspection: "In the pursuit of his task he said very little, and few quotable words came from his thin lips. One brief sentence deserves to be recalled: "The

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[490] Noel Annan. "Konrad Adenauer" *Grand Street* (Volume 2, no. 1, Autumn, 1982) p 94.

[491] Konrad Kellen. "Adenauer at 90" *Foreign Affairs* (Volume 44, no 2, January, 1966) p. 275

[492] op cit., Darboven. Dia:Beacon website

vanquished must have patience."[493]

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The great and many differences between Bismarck and Adenauer highlight the very same historical shifts Darboven documents with her meticulously crafted works on paper, yet do so with immediate symbolic force. In this sense they serve a different purpose to the religious symbols, and point to an essential feature of Darboven's work: the dominance of real, political work over the concern for the spiritual. While there is a meditative quality to her work, evident in her ritualised practice, Darboven's commitment to creative action and a tangible, systematic working-through of memory and history points to a parallel commitment to the workings of political resolution. *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* is more than a representation or formation of *thought as form. Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* is a demonstration of Hanne Darboven's belief in, and commitment to thought as a discipline that must extend beyond the confines of the academy and its texts, and into the world.

[493] op. cit., Kellen. p 276

4. ANDREW WEAR,

I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008

What is your aim in philosophy? – To shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle.
Ludwig Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*

...not into another fly-bottle.
Viggo Rossvær *Philosophy as an Art Form*

The installation *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008* was constructed during the writing of this thesis, and this chapter, a first-hand account of the creation of a work of art, issues its final turn. The potential problems arising from presenting a work of art created by me as a study within the constructs of this thesis are significant, but not deterrent. The first, and most obvious change is the shift to first-person analysis and description. While this stylistic shift alters notions of perception and interpretation, it offers insights into the artist's thought during the process of organising form. As an introduction to how one might manage this shift, I draw upon Kantian distinctions of judgement as elucidated in the First Moment of the First Book of the First Division of Part 1 of his *Critique of Judgement.* Kant writes:

> In order to decide whether anything is beautiful or not, we refer the representation, not by the Understanding to the Object for cognition but, by the Imagination (perhaps in conjunction with the Understanding) to the subject, and its feeling of pleasure and pain. The judgement of taste is therefore not a judgement of cognition, and is consequently not logical but aesthetical, by which we understand that whose determining ground can be *no other than subjective.* Every reference of representations, even that of sensations, may be objective (and then it signifies the real in an empirical representation); save only the reference to the feeling of pleasure and pain, by which nothing in the Object is signified, but through which there is a feeling in the subject, as it is affected by the representation.
>
> To apprehend a singular, purposive building by means of one's cognitive faculty (whether in a clear or a confused way of representation) is something quite different from being conscious of this representation as connected with the sensation of satisfaction. Here the representation is altogether referred to the subject and to its feeling of life, under the name of the feeling of pleasure or pain. This establishes a quite separate faculty of distinction and of judgement, adding nothing to cognition, but only comparing the given representation in the subject with the whole faculty of representations, of which the mind is conscious in the feeling of its state. Given

> representations in a judgement can be empirical (consequently, aesthetical); but the judgement which is formed by means of them is logical, provided they are referred in the judgement to the Object. Conversely, if the given representations are rational, but are referred in a judgement simply to the subject (to its feeling), the judgement is so far always aesthetical.[494]

This passage provides the founding distinction between *cognitive* and *sensual* judgement that remains ever-present in aesthetic philosophy in the West. One such example is Aldrich's understanding of the role cognition plays in judgement as defined, when represented, as the *characterization of the work of art.*[495]

The work in question – *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008* – is *en homage* to aesthetic and conceptual features with the other works (of art and philosophy[496]) discussed thus far, irrespective of any claims to relative stature or merit. Again, the temporal concerns of the work, in title and in subject, bring a recurrent theme to the thesis, as does my concern with the relationship between *concept* and *form.* In keeping with the structure of the previous chapters, and aided by the structure of the final installation of *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008*, I will break the chapter into divisions in elements (as with Joseph Beuys's *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1965* and Hanne Darboven's *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*) supported by an overview in conceptual reference. That is, while the work consists of eight stations[497] they are each infused with an over-arching series of conceptual references, in many cases deliberately drawn from the works presented in this thesis.

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[494] Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952) p. 27

[495] "It is little more relevant to characteristics of the art work to call it nice, charming, pretty, lovely, beautiful. But even these remarks turn out to be expressions of likes and dislikes in many cases; and even when they are intended as statements about the work of art, they fail to characterize it .But when someone says of the work of art that it is dynamic, or unified, or delicate, or warm, or formal, or economical, then obviously some sort of characterization of the work of art is going on ..one who is talking in terms of this set of remarks is at least trying to be objective in some tantalizing way. He means to report something in the art work." Virgil C. Aldrich *Philosopy of Art* (Eaglewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc , 1963) p. 6

[496] The presence of philosophical text within the work of art should not undermine the thesis' claims concerning the philosophical independence of the work of art; rather, it should contribute to the notion of a post-philosophical realm where the distinction between the making of art and the making of philosophy are conflated

[497] A number of artists since Beuys have used the notion of 'stations' in a work, implying order without necessarily suggesting linearity. For instance, Barnett Newman and Matthew Barney. Further readings: John P. O'Neill (ed) *Barnett Newman Selected Writings and Interviews* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1990) pp. 187-191 and op. cit., Spector

Critical to the work's final creation is a performance, titled *I Make Myself (sic)*, that took place in 1996. As a prelude to this chapter's dissection of the installation, constructed some twelve years later, I will describe the conceptual backdrop to, and performance of *I Make Myself (sic).*

4.1 The shaping of *post-philosophical* thinking: from performance to installation

This thesis has uncovered notions of performance as critical to the reading of works by both Beuys and Darboven, but it has not fully explicated the emergence and role of performance as a 'visual art genre.' This is in part because the works discussed within the respective chapters dedicated to those artists were sculptural works, with reference and incorporation (Beuys) or essential characteristics (Darboven) marking a performance or action. The performance *I Make Myself (sic)* acts as gambit for this chapter's first-hand account of engaging with *concept* and *form*, providing the perfect opportunity to precede with an abbreviated exegesis of the emergence of performance (otherwise referred to as *Aktionen*, or as *Happenings*[498]) as an art form.

The first era of performance as knowingly constructed within the confines of visual arts culture began in the mid- to late-1950s, and gathered momentum in the 1960s. Beuys is a critical player during this period, and is recognised as being at the forefront of performance as visual art; however, many consider Japan's Gutai group's presentation of a manifesto[499] in 1956, as pre-emptory to the dominance of European performance art. Within these excerpts from the manifesto, one might consider (while taking into account the acknowledged influence of Dadaism) the Gutai manifesto as the first, detailed expression of this departure:

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[498] There have been deliberate attempts by artists and theorists to label their performance work for varied reasons – delineation, posterity or classification – however I will use performance (deliberate lower-case spelling) as a cover-all descriptor for the actions of artists and viewers within the constructs of visual art Performance is perhaps avoided by visual artists due to the disciplinary connotations of the term. Beuys referred to all of his perfomance as *der Aktionen* while the works of the New York avant-garde, led by the likes of Allan Kaprow, referred to their performance as 'Happenings.' For further reading. Allan Kaprow *Assemblages, Environments and Happenings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966)

[499] Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (eds.). *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1996) pp. 695-698.

> With our present awareness, the arts we have known up to now appear to us in general to be fakes fitted out with a tremendous affectation. Let us take leave of these piles of counterfeit objects on the altars, in the palaces, in the salons and the antique shops. These objects are in disguise and their materials such as paint, pieces of cloth, metals, clay or marble are loaded with false significance by human hand...Lock these corpses into their tombs. Gutai art does not change the material but brings it to life. Gutai art does not falsify the material. In Gutai art the human spirit and the material reach out their hands to each other.. After Pollock many Pollock-imitators appeared, but Pollock's splendour will never be extinguished. The talent of invention deserves respect. Kazuo Shiraga placed a lump of paint on a huge piece of paper, and started to spread it around violently with his feet. For about the last two years art journalists have called this unprecedented method "the Art of committing the whole self with the body " Kazuo Shiraga had no intention at all of making this strange method known to the public. He had merely found the method which enabled him to confront and unite the material he had chosen with his own spiritual dynamics...In contrast to Shiraga...Shozo Shimamoto has been working with mechanical manipulations for the past few years. The spray pictures created by smashing a bottle full of paint, or the large surface made in a single moment by firing a small, hand-made cannon filled with paint by means of an acetylene gas explosion, display a breathtaking freshness...Our group does not impose restrictions on the art of its members, letting them make full use of their creativity...many different experiments were carried out with extraordinary activity such as art felt with the entire body, art which could only be touched...Sometimes, at first glance, we are compared with and mistaken for Dadaism, and we ourselves fully recognize the achievements of Dadaism. But we think differently, in contrast to Dadaism, our work is the result of investigating the possibilities of calling the material to life. We shall hope that there is always a fresh spirit in our Gutai exhibitions and that the discovery of new life will call forth a tremendous scream in the material itself.[500]

This resonates with the Beuysian notion of *Aktionen* and his brief association with later collectives such as Fluxus, for whom *Happenings* became central to their position within the arts. However, while Gutai and Fluxus embraced either spirituality or political activity to colour their philosophical backdrop, the true source for these impulses and the challenge to 'expand the concept of art' is unequivocally recognised as Dada:

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[500] Jiro Yoshihara. "The Gutai Manifsto" Proclaimed in October 1956, published in December 1956 in the art journal *Geyutsu Shincho.* (http://www.ashiyaweb or jp/museum/10us/103education/nyumon_us/manifest_us.htm) Accessed 14.23, October 7, 2009.

> Dada is the groundwork to abstract art and sound poetry, a starting point for performance art, a prelude to postmodernism, an influence on pop art, a celebration of antiart to be later embraced for anarcho-political uses in the 1960s and the movement that lay the foundation for Surrealism.[501]

This is further summarised by Allan Kaprow in his text *Assemblages, Environments and Happenings*, written between 1959 and 1961 in which he outlines the important shift from *Environment* to *Happening*:

> Though the Environments are free with respect to media and appeals to the senses, the chief accents to date have been visual, tactile and manipulative. Time (compared with space), sound (compared with tangible objects), and the physical presence of people (compared with the physical surroundings), tend to be subordinate elements. Suppose, however, one wanted to amplify the potentialities of these subordinates The objective would be a unified field of components in which all were theoretically equivalent and sometimes exactly equal. It would require scoring the components more conscientiously into the work, giving people more responsibility, and the inanimate parts roles more in keeping with the whole. Time would be variously weighted, compressed, or drawn out, sounds would emerge forthrightly, and things would have to be set in greater motion. The event which has done this is increasingly called a 'Happening.'[502]

It is essential to take into account "time...sound...and the physical presence of people" within the performance *I Make Myself (sic)* as "equivalent and sometimes exactly equal" to (I might even add *greater than*) the traditional formal reading. The temporal relationship the witness/viewer has with performance determined an important conceptual backdrop for *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008*. The contemporaneity of a performed work of art has ramifications for both the artist (representational) and the viewer (interpretive). Live performance is necessarily – to varying degrees – at the mercy of circumstance during its course. Unexpected interruptions or distractions to performance can produce unexpected results; recall the iconic defiance of Beuys's bloody-nosed figure, captured by photographer Heinrich Riebesehl, after his *Aktion* descended into a *mêlée* with incensed right-wing students.[503] Post-performance representations of the work (in still or moving image, and/or in essay) may be, like more formally constructed works of art, subject to adjustment or editing so as to present a 'preferable' self-mythologisation, however the original performance is bound to an

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[501] Marc Lowenthal. Translator's introduction to Francis Picabia *I Am a Beautiful Monster Poetry, Prose, And Provocation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts MIT Press, 2007) p 11.

[502] op. cit., Kaprow p 187

[503] See Adam Oellers. "Fluxus at the Border: Aachen, July 20, 1964" op. cit., Gillen pp. 200-207

artistically unique spatio-temporal condition. The greater work (*I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008*) takes the initial performance as a point of departure from whence the relationship between the artist and the viewer is constructed. To clarify this, I will describe the performance and the significance of the actions within. However, I would first like to explain the title.

The full title – *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008* – denotes a whole work made up of two parts. The first part is the title of the aforementioned performance – *I Make Myself (sic).* This performance took place on October 5, 1996 at the Livid Arts Festival, Brisbane.[504] The second part – *I Still Make Myself (sic)* – is the title of a work installed at Inflight Gallery, Hobart in April, 2008. The full title serves to draw the two works together as one, emphasises the significance of the time between the two works, and (by incorporating the respective date marking each work *into* the title) is thus a deliberate acknowledgement of the tradition marked in the titles of Beuys's and Darboven's works.

The location, and my desire to present an engaging and challenging performance within this setting, was critical to determining the preparation for the original performance. Unlike the more refined setting of a gallery, or space assigned as solely for the work, performing in these settings necessitates competition for attention. Subtlety of movement or sound can be overwhelmed by noise and crowds, while the more serendipitous fortunes of the festival-goer outnumber the more focussed and committed gallery-goer. This proffers mixed opportunity; the wider audience of the festival provide the opportunity for exposure beyond the more refined gallery setting, however the less committed viewer is less likely to make considered observations amidst the masses.

The performance was well attended, in part for the promise of audience involvement in a unique and challenging work of art. Involving the audience in a participatory setting is fraught with logistical risks, and was particularly true of *I Make Myself (sic).* The most basic description of the original work is as an interactive performance, involving audience participation, whereby members of the audience proffered words that I tattooed on myself.

Logistically, the time allocated for *I Make Myself (sic)* meant that I had time to accept and self-inscribe five words, onto the lower-right front of my torso, just above the

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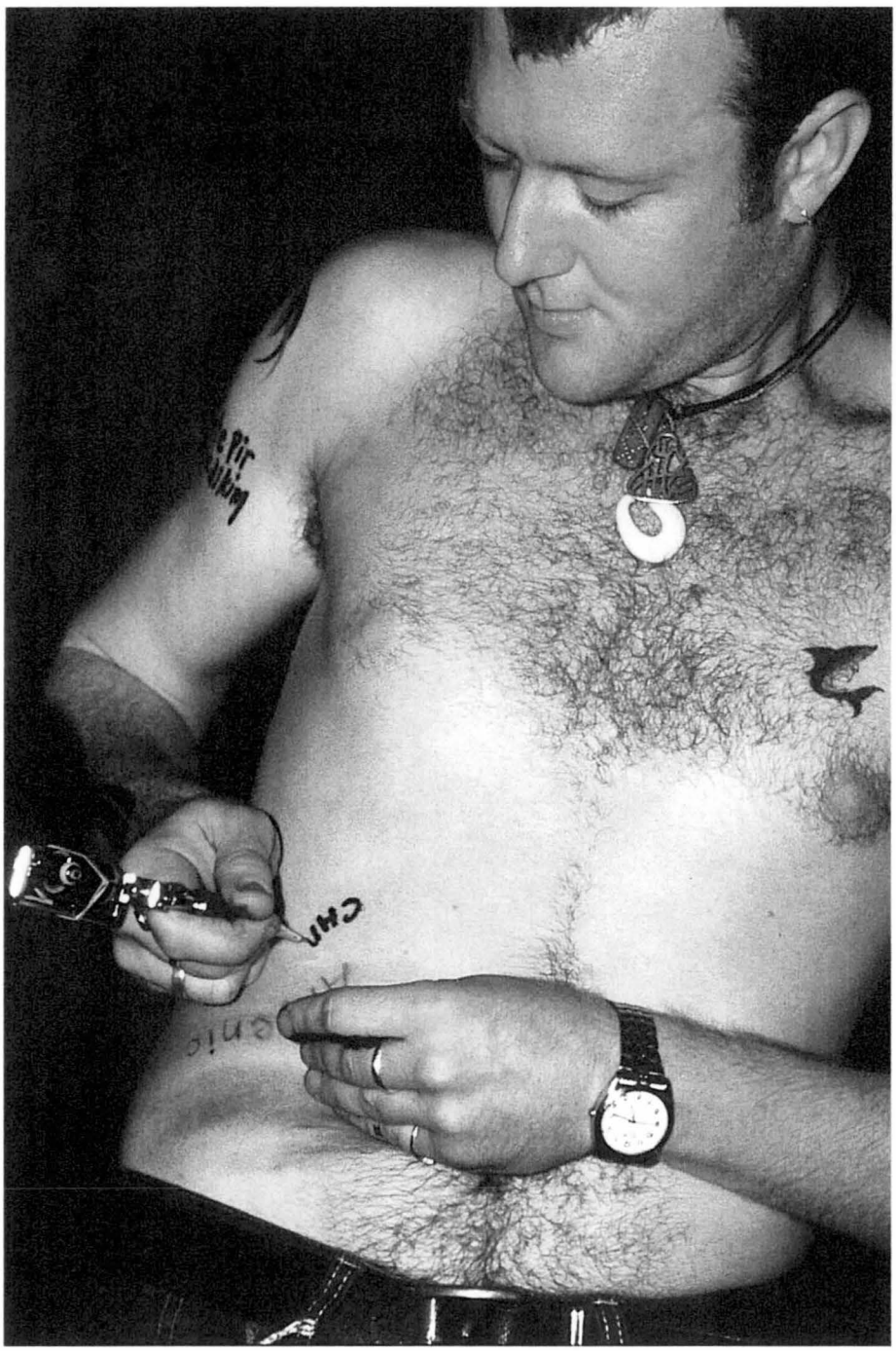
[504] The Livid Festival an annual music and arts festival that ran in various locations in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia from 1989 until 2003

trouser-line. As the act of tattooing words on oneself on that part of the body, in a standing position, is most expediently performed by writing from the artist's perspective, the words – *Arsenic*, *Christianity*, *Parsnip*, *Fridges*, *Dust* – appear, to the viewer, upside-down.



(Fig. 51) Andrew Wear. *I Make Myself (sic)* (1996) Livid Arts Festival, Brisbane.
Performance still. Photograph by Sam Charlton

Among the potential problems engendered by this performance, and the liberty extended to the participants, was the possibility of a participant proffering an obscene or vulgar word. It seemed inappropriate to impose censorship on a work that was, at least in its intent, determined to question the limits of certain physical and aesthetic domains. Another contingent factor and logistical concern was the varied textual length of the words proffered. That is, a twelve-letter word (*Christianity*) is significantly more time-consuming to tattoo than a four-letter word (*Dust*). However, the performance ran according to schedule and without hindrance.

Overall, the aesthetic aspects of my performative work has greatly informed the later, completed work. There is certainly no doubt that the random selection of participants, each contributing different words, adds a modicum of absurdity to the work; however the visual representation these words determined was countered by a unifying consideration of physicality and temporality in the later, more expansive work. Moreover, Darboven's rendering of history by way of the diverse and seemingly discordant imagery in *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* prompted a rendering of these offerings as representative of personal histories, thoughts, or momentary impressions that carried with them each a significance that came to bear on the later work.

Rather than commit a separate segment to detailing the interregnum between the 1996 performance and the 2008 installation, it should suffice to say that the tattoos remain. Although this performance remains anomalous in my general art practice, the conceptual ramifications remained strong, singularly informing the preparation and construction of the 2008 installation *I Still Make Myself (sic).*

4.2 The work:

I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008

The installation *I Still Make Myself (sic)* was *in situ* at Inflight Gallery between April 4 and April 26, 2008. The shape and symmetry of the rectangular, main gallery-space determined the layout of the installation with regards to the placement of the eight stations and their respective elements. Despite the conceptual nature of the work as relative to the performance twelve years prior, traditional, spatially considered aesthetic notions of balance and harmony came to the fore during the consideration of the layout.

The title of the work effectively has three parts: first, *I Make Myself*, an acknowledgement of the capacity of an individual to shape their own identity according to reality and/or myth. Second, the use of the Latin word *sic*, and thirdly, the complete title which, by way of play on words is presented, when spoken as: "I make myself sick." Thus the personal nature of art practice is presented so as to be in sync with (although a distinct variation on) the personal mythologies and histories crafted by Beuys, Kiefer and Darboven. The very construction of our identities as laden with questions of morality brings to the fore questions varying from the contemplation of guilt in our actions, to how we interact and present ourselves to others. The title represents questions of choice of action and morality, and, in this instance, the relationship between these choices, and creativity. Furthermore, the apparent seriousness of tattooing one's own body *in the name of art* raises a range of questions concerning physical boundaries and regards for the body (and the subsequent relationship this has to respect for societal norms) perhaps more than it does questions of showmanship and self-mythologisation.

In terms of practicality, the nature of some of the materials involved determined spatial considerations for the viewers; for example, during the course of installation, the placement of some works, such as *Christianity* – a large, suspended sheet of transparent acrylic glass – proved problematic. Until I located *Parsnip* underneath it, the viewer was constantly at risk of walking into the suspended work, entertaining the possibility of physical harm or structural damage. Until the entire installation has been explained, and context introduced, these logistical problems sound a little odd. To clarify, I will proceed with this chapter by way of entering the space as a viewer, entering and encountering the work in its entirety, before moving from the entrance-end left of the room counter-clockwise through the stations and finally observing the two central elements.

4.2.1 *1996 / 2008*

(Fig. 52) Andrew Wear *1996 / 2008* (2008) Mixed Media. Dimensions variable.

Photograph by Kevin Leong.

> One cannot guess how a word functions one has to *look at* its use and learn from that.
>
> But the difficulty is to remove the prejudice which stands in the way of doing this. It is not a *stupid* prejudice.[505]

The first work 'encountered' according to the suggested clockwise viewing scheme consists of two large photographs thumb-tacked on to plywood boards. The board on the left (dominated by the photograph taken by Sam Charlton during the 1996 performance) is exhibited on a simple, A-frame artist's easel. The board on the right (dominated by a 're-enactment' photograph taken by Kylie Gardener in 2008) rests against the wall, sitting horizontally on the floor. At first glance, one might say both works have been 'violated' by a mixture of montage, painting and naïve graffiti. The different height and formatting of the images, and the violation of their surfaces, have both aesthetic and conceptual significance within the work. A third part of this work is located between the legs of the easel, and consists of an open book on a wooden block.

This work was planned as an aesthetic and referential anchor to the greater installation. Incorporating both a photographic record of the original performance and a current photographic record, the work binds the two temporally disparate events in a single location. Before considering the overlayed elements, I will compare and contrast the two photographic images, so as to develop an understanding of the relationship between the performance and the installation, or, more importantly, the relationship between the artist in 1996, and the artist in 2008. This relationship, and the relationship formed between two temporally distanced works by the same artist, is often subjected to analysis and discussion within art history. An exemplary case in point is a recent discussion with Australian multi-media artist Mike Parr. In an interview in conjunction with the 2008 Sydney Biennale, Parr attempts to work through the processes from concept to display by way of recalling a confrontation between himself and a friend, during which he was accused of 'violating' his own work:

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[505] Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Investigations* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2001) p 109

> ...violating my own work is what I do...we in the art world continually regress to familar patterns...the basis for my performance work has often been quite ironical and ridiculous, assaults on these configurations, like the one where I put the tacks into my leg and trained myself to do it very accurately every inch or so, straight up my leg. So what you're encouraged to do was to look at a virtuoso act of measurement and placement, but it was problematised because this wasn't just a piece of stretched canvas; this was the human body. So, all my work, in a way, has been about acting out quite a rigorous formalist container and then worrying about the outcome.[506]

Parr's reliance on formalist tradition to subvert formalist practice is a fascinating reference point for all of the works studied in this thesis, and is a familiar aspect of Adorno's thought as discussed in the chapter concerning his relationship to Beuys and post-war German art. What Parr brings to the discourse is an insider's view to the process and outcomes of this approach. The most poignant development in Parr's method – and in my own – is the relationship formed between concept and form as shaped by the changes that occur within the life-course of a work of art:

> ...So what this means is that all those performances you see upstairs begin as statements, and some of those statements go right back to the early 1970s...[for instance] *nail your hand to a tree* – that's a very alarming proposition...I tried very hard at the time that I wrote the statements – because I wasn't doing performance at that very point, because this is 1971-72, I was only beginning to do performance – these were ideas that came into my head that were often quite hilarious in their excessiveness, and in their excessiveness of impulse I would try to reduce them to a fairly elegant written form, to just sort of, stop them. And then later I got to the point where I decided to perform these things, and then later I got to the point where I decided to perform and film these things. But the thing I want to say is, there's absolutely no equivalence, or no exact equivalence between the statement, the performance, and the film. And that process of...um...not recapitulation, but that process of displacement is where the thinking begins.[507]

Thus Parr appears to invert the process to some degree, considering the 'thinking' beginning at the point of final displacement. This resonates with Darboven's work as presented herein, and is an interesting perspective when considering the relationship between my 1996 performance and the 2008 installation, particularly the 'violation' of the imagery within. It emphasises the post-philosophical claims such works make, whereby the form informs the thought. While I contend that it is a more symbiotic movement

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[506] Mike Parr. "Mike Parr at the Biennale of Sydney, September 2008" *The Monthly* Online video lecture, transcribed by author October 7, 2009. (http //www.themonthly.com.au/tm/node/1232) Accessed 12.45, October 7, 2009

[507] ibid.

between the two processes, Parr's position is evidence of an ongoing challenge to the traditional understanding of the relationship between art and philosophy. How, then, might this affect the reading of the work in question?

On closer inspection, it becomes apparent that in the 2008 photograph is an attempt to replicate the pose captured in the 1996 performance photograph. The 1996 photograph has been reversed so as to suggest a mirror image of the other. There is no complexity in this symbolism; the reversal of the image represents a reversal of the action. That is, in considering the action after twelve years is suggestive of a return to an act with notions of hindsight and greater understanding. Perhaps, then, Parr's insistence that thinking starts at the point of final displacement holds certain truths as enacted in this arrangement. Beyond the immediate symbolism of the mirror image, there are features within the image that build meaning. In the 2008 photograph the artist is holding a knife to the tattooed area, in the place where the tattooing implement rested in the 1996 photograph; a suggestive pose, perhaps in readiness to carve the words from the body. This re-enactment questions the original performance, countering any prevailing sense of the installation as celebration of the performance. The two images are presented to highlight the performance and the consequences, eliciting questions of will and determinacy and the distinction between the physical and the temporal. Irrespective of the significant difference between the conditions of production and reception of this work and those by the other artists studied herein, such representation nonetheless remains a critical thread. Historical contingency, so essential to Darboven's method, becomes a key concern in this work, albeit a more idiosyncratic one.

The 1996 photograph is mounted on the easel in the upright, portrait format, highlighting the primacy of the performance. The 2008 photograph is on the gallery floor in the horizontal, landscape format. This repose underscores the latter work as embodying the somewhat passive normalcy of an 'everyday life' beyond the scars of past actions. This staging is aesthetic; a visual refutation of the notion of historical linearity. That is, rather than *the then* being side-lined for the celebration of *the now*, this work places the present in the shadows of the past. Understanding this dynamic within the work highlights the title, and *vice versa.*

The title of this particular work (inadvertently highlighting the time elapsed between the two works) questions one's capacity or incapacity for change, implicating modernity. *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008* is conceptually reliant on the existing tension between the project of modernity and the challenges of postmodernity; notably along the fault-lines of ambiguity and irony. Whilst ambiguity (as outlined in the chapter on Kiefer's *Notung*) features prominently in maintaining this tension, irony – particularly as a rhetorical and literary method with a long and varied history – is not so readily defined. In the literature that defines postmodernism (and is often critiqued for its convolutions) irony's role in the assessment of this relationship is evident. Typically, it is the "postmodern ironic rethinking of history"[508] that forms this distinction, and it is this reading to which I defer here. The work acknowledges this precisely because of the cross-temporality inherent in the work, and the questions concerning change. Not only is it subjectively laden with these features, but aesthetically laden as well. The deliberate violation of the photograph (representing truth and reality – *the camera never lies*) with dripped paint, montage, scrawled writing and unformed symbols presents an aesthetic dichotomy. Furthermore, the aforementioned reversal of the 1996 photograph is another such method designed to undo the relationship between photographic representation and realism.

The 1996 photograph is certainly less adulterated; marked only by dripped, white acrylic house-paint and hand-written script. The dripped paint serves as reference to the painterly-performative tradition of 'deliberately indiscriminate' dripping (most famously undertaken by Jackson Pollock, and celebrated in the Gutai Manifesto). However, the use of this technique has become so widespread as to succeed, conceptually, only in such a referential form. The text appears similarly indiscriminate, however there is a formula driving the choices. Scrawled across the board framing the photographs are the following fragments:

> 1996
> Artists who namedrop philosophers sign here:
> Here is the avalanche that combined with the mudslide affected a complete shortage
> Don't screw with Jesus
> Do you make the art/word or does the art/word make you?
> Do ____ make the art or does the art make

[508] Linda Hutcheon. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York, London: Routledge, 1988) p 5

and here is the cigarette I promised you on your death bed and remember the things I promised you and I failed you
It only there is no art there is no art
self-referential
27 degrees
Had written Arsenic was yet to write Christianity parsnip fridges dust Was yet to move to Dublin Was yet to have children Was yet to start study Was yet to move to Hobart Was yet to exhibit

Darboven's textual and visual fragments are the clearest influence on this indexical collection, however, despite the hermeneutic potential these textual fragments possess, they are, ultimately, reflexive. Obvious references (for instance, the year of the performance, and the positing of the point of the performance captured in the photograph as relative to other events in the artist's life) are marked alongside, or in some instances over, more cryptic notes. The point of reference for the statement: *Here is the avalanche that combined with the mudslide affected a complete shortage* recalls how, as paint may be applied with hope of some serendipitous result, so too words chosen with a certain randomness reflect the character of the visual. This apparent randomness should not be put to one side as irrelevant. If the so-called 'language of art' is in any way presented as a parallel to the language of words, then consider Wittgenstein's comment:

> When a sentence is called senseless, it is not as it were its sense that is senseless. But a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation.[509]

That Wittgenstein appears, somewhat incongruously, amidst what has been a thesis by-and-large committed to expanding the work of Frankfurt School Critical Theory is not cause for alarm. After all, it should be re-stated that one of this thesis' central claims is that the conflation of disparate thought is made possible in the visual field. Again, ironic or ambiguous references might be considered key tools for assisting this conflation. For example, the visually separated (but textually connected) statements *Do you make the art/word or does the art/word make you?* and *Do ____ make the art or does the art make* are also related to Wittgenstein's thoughts concerning language. In this instance, however, I present the language of words and the language of art as a single entity. Or, rather, I question whether the two forms are compatible according to Wittgenstein's theory concerning the contextual relation between language and "form of life":

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[509] op cit., Wittgenstein p 139

> ...Suppose you came as an explorer into an unknown country with a language quite strange to you. In what circumstances would you say that the people gave orders, understood them, obeyed them, rebelled against them, and so on?
>
> The common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language...Let us imagine that the people of this country carried on the usual human activities and in the course of them employed, apparently, an articulate language. If we watch their behaviour we find it intelligible, it seems 'logical'. But when we try to learn their language we find it impossible to do so. For there is nor regular connexion between what they say, the sounds they make, and their actions; but still these sounds are not superfluous, for if we gag one of the people, it has the same consequences as with us; without the sounds their actions fall into confusion...[510]

Whether the viewer considers Kiefer's referential text, Darboven's deliberately ambiguous text, or the more random text present in *1996 / 2008*, the use of text/words/language herein accounts for this brief consideration of Wittgenstein's theory.

(Fig. 53) Detail: *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008* (2008) Photograph by Kevin Leong.

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[510] ibid., p. 82.

Turning to the 2008 photograph, the viewer encounters a more defined writing style, applied in cursive script and with a greater reliance on single-word markings. This contributes to a more defiant aesthetic:

2008
Mittwoch
Kipp
Qu
Averidge
Average
Average
Casiotone
It's a boy
You are a philistine boy
Congratulations
Empire
Republic

In addition to this odd assortment, there are, bunched onto the hand of the 2008 image, the following 'occupations':

economist
lawyer
telephonist
Spanish teacher
mechanic
agrarian socialist
surgeon
cubist
sociophobe
you
me

While the horizontal positioning of the work on the gallery floor represents the stability and calm one encounters with the passing of time, the less formal script juxtaposes life's emergent complexities. The 'occupations' are a confirmation of the expansive possibilities of youth becoming more refined and defined with time, while references such as *Empire* and *Republic* point to historical shifts. In addition to these targeted references, the ambiguous presence of misspelt (*Averige*) or incomplete (*Qu* and *Kipp*)

words provokes the viewer into questions concerning the artist's intention. That is, if it is presumed that the artist is capable of spelling or completing simple or significant words, what is the reason behind these deliberate misspellings? While it is not unusual for artists to leave interpretation up to the viewer, in this instance, the mass of visual and textual 'data' makes this somewhat problematic. The viewers' responses were mixed, however the progression from confusion to interest generally followed a course of inquiry, which overtook any ambiguity or ambivalence.[511]

The final part of this work is a book, laid open atop a small wooden plinth beneath the A-frame (Fig. 54). The book is a children's natural history encyclopaedia whose pages have been torn, cut, inscribed with text and painted. The painted motifs are simple references; on the left, a primitively copied magnification of one of the photographs from the book, and on the right a reproduction of an image I had drawn some years earlier while reading Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logicus Philosophicus* (Fig. 55).[512] The incongruous placement of such images is a deliberate aesthetic method used to highlight the many and varied interpretations available to the viewer. So as to draw attention to the relationship this approach has to the performance and installation, I have written, on the far right of the open book: "In 1996 I tattooed the words fridges, arsenic, Christianity, dust and parsnip on myself."

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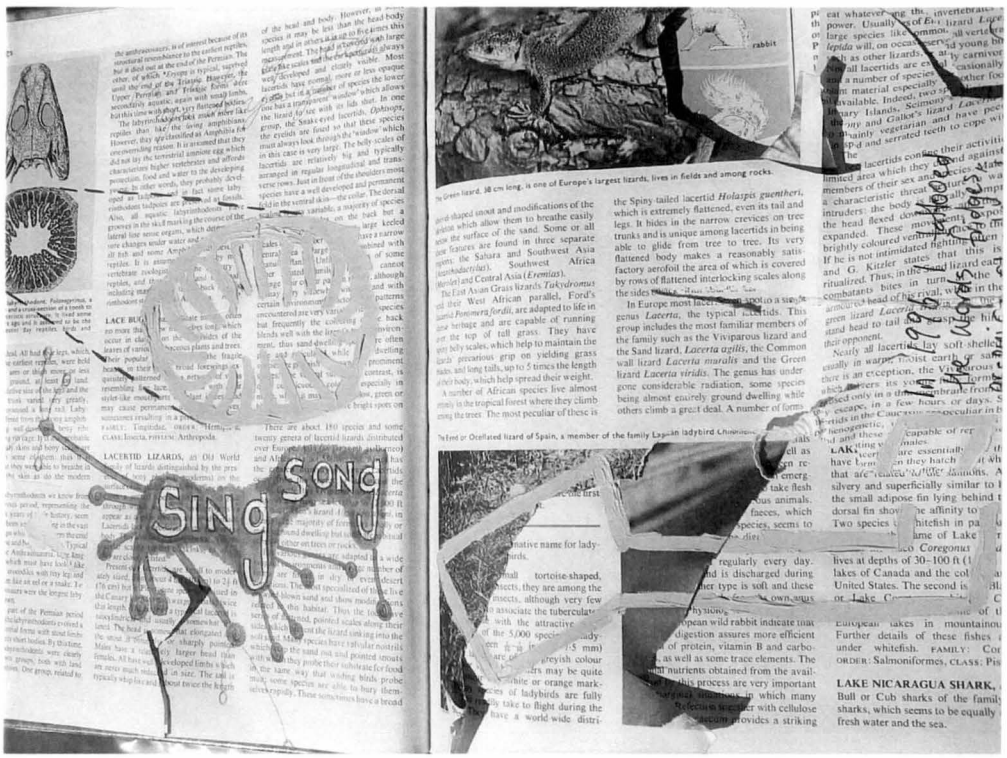
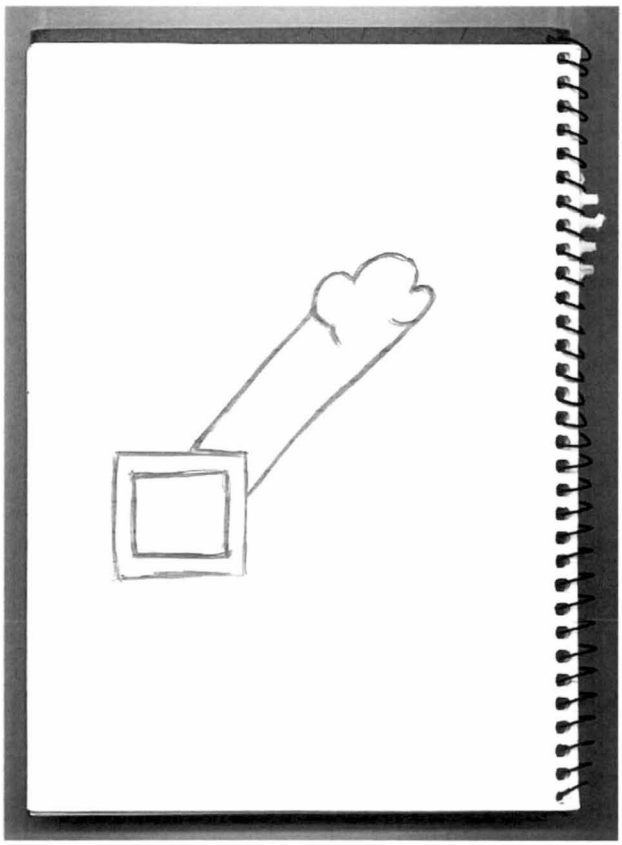
[511] These impressions are gleaned from responses to, interpretation of, and interaction with the conceptual explications of the work encountered during the programmed artist's talk, held at Inflight Gallery on April 6, 2008.

[512] This simple motif primitively represents an epistemic expansion beyond what is immediately presented, in the text, as 'easy'. "...everything I say must be easy to understand, indeed trivial; but it will be hard to understand *why* I say it." Ludwig Wittgenstein, quoted in Preface to Garth Hallett *A Companion to Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations"* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1977) p. 9.



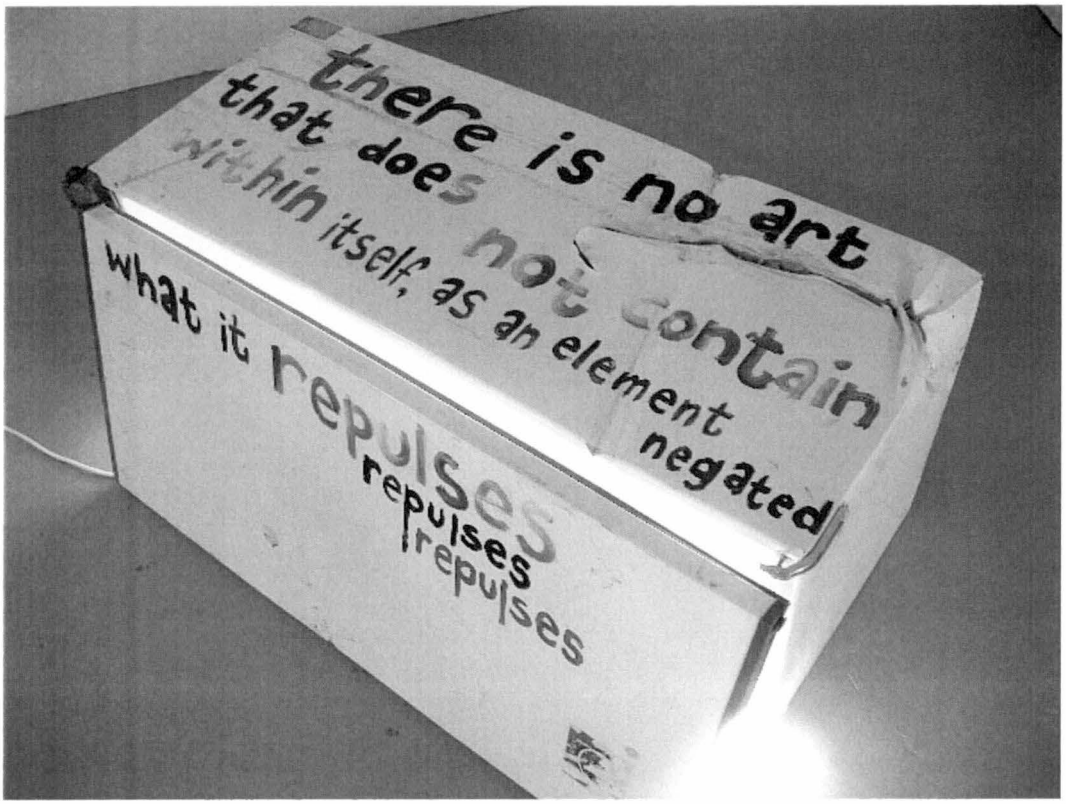
(Fig. 54) Detail: *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008* (2008) Photograph by Kevin Leong.



(Fig. 55) Andrew Wear *Tractatus Logicus Philosophicus* (2005) Ink on paper 21 cm x 15 cm

This particular part of the work serves as a purging of experience and text, and, though Wittgenstein is a reference to the viewing and interpretation of this work, the overall aesthetic is at odds with Wittgenstein's logical textual construction. Thus, while the distinction between the broader aesthetic and the conceptual design of *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008* is most clear at this station, the tension contained within this deliberately energetic fusion dissipates as the viewer considers the more austere works of the installation.

4.2.2 *Fridges*



(Fig. 56) Andrew Wear *Fridges* (2008) from *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008.*
Refrigerator, fluorescent light, oil paint and enamel paint. Dimensions variable.
Photograph by Kevin Leong

If the viewer maintains a counter-clockwise path through the installation, she or he encounters one of the less ambiguously titled works: *Fridges*. The simple construction of this work disguises the manifold references; not least the adapted passage of text taken from Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* painted on its outer surface. This work is, simply, a malfunctioning and discarded refrigerator, laid on its side, door ajar. Fluorescent light emits from within. *There is no art that does not contain within itself, as an element, negated, what it repulses*[513] is painted (in mixed black, white and grey tones) on the upwards-facing side and the door. The word *repulses* is repeated twice, as if mimicking an echo, emphasising the already acute phrasing. This sentence comes from the first chapter of *Aesthetic Theory*, "Art, Society, Aesthetics." Two questions arise here: first, "What does Adorno mean?"

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[513] op. cit., Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory* p. 13.

and second, "What significance does this meaning have in this (and, consequently, the greater) art work?"

Before entering this inquiry, we might be reminded of the established understanding concerning the reading of Adorno's text as presented earlier in this thesis. Stylistically alone, Adorno's work questions matters of content, intent and interpretation to such a degree that reading these words together as an autonomous statement requires necessary caution. Ironically, set against the purported maze of its text, the non-linearity of *Aesthetic Theory* assists such piecemeal referencing. Nevertheless, it remains bound to a greater theoretical system. That is, that although these words are taken from Adorno's 'first' chapter, it is by no means within the scope of any broad, sweeping introductory tract. It is, however, an integral statement for understanding Adorno's greater (negative) dialectical project. This idea of something emerging as what it is not, with intent, is a recurrent theme for Adorno:

> In *Aesthetic Theory*, and throughout his critical writings, he is clear that art's detachment from the world...may end up as a kind of consolation for, and affirmation of, the world as it is.[514]

Adorno repeats this dictum throughout *Aesthetic Theory*; building upon what had become the cornerstone for his theory in earlier works. The constant to-ing and fro-ing of conceptual analysis is no more evident than in "Art, Society, Aesthetics" where the reader immediately encounters his chiastic bombast. The passage painted on the refrigerator is no more than a continuation of this, however in the formation of *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008* it became the most poignant and climactic passage.

The passage from whence this text was extracted contains critical points where Adorno outlines the historically constructed dialectic of cultural modernity, both absorbing and admonishing his Hegelian roots so as to further develop his already substantive negative dialectic. To accomplish this, he presents a "confrontation [between] two heterogenous thinkers"[515] as the manifestation of contemporary aesthetic judgement. Kant and Freud become representatives of this problematic condition in which the viewer is torn between the formal and psychoanalytical readings of art. This is a significant point, and

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[514] Alex Thomson *Adorno. A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2006) p 50

[515] op. cit., Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory* p. 13.

for Adorno to consider some synthesis by way of negation is important not only as representative of his negative dialectic, but as representative of the institutionalised theoretical divisions that haunt academic schools of philosophy and art history. Adorno, typically, fires such shots across the bow of this domineering theoretical force:

> For psychoanalysis considers artworks to be essentially unconscious projections of those who have produced them, and, preoccupied with the hermeneutics of thematic material, it forgets the categories of form and, so to speak, transfers the pedantry of sensitive doctors to the most inappropriate objects...[516]

Likewise, Adorno is critical of the failings of Kantian aesthetics, which dominate academic aesthetic philosophy, whereby:

> Kant's aesthetics is the antithesis of Freud's theory of art as wish fulfilment. Disinterested liking is the first element of the judgement of taste in the "Analytic of the Beautiful." There interest is termed "the liking that we combine with the representation of the existence of an object."...The accent on "representation" is a consequence of Kant's subjectivist approach, which in accord with the rationalistic tradition...tacitly seeks aesthetic quality in the effect the work has on the observer.[517]

It with a sense of expectation that Adorno takes both Freud's and Kant's aesthetics and recognises that for each, there is a necessarily paradoxical/negative element within, preparing the reader for the quote in question:

> Even for Freud artworks are not immediate wish fulfilments but transform unsatisfied libido into a socially productive achievement, whereby the social value of art is simply assumed...[518]

and Kant:

> ...even Kant is compelled to consider the existing individual, the ontic element, more than is compatible with the idea of the transcendental subject. There is no liking without a living person who would enjoy it.[519]

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[516] ibid., p. 9.

[517] ibid., pp. 11-12.

[518] ibid , p. 12.

[519] ibid., p. 13.

As Adorno notes the absence of self-evidence as necessarily the only self-evidence, "absolute freedom" as contradicting the "perennial unfreedom" and countering emancipation with blindness,[520] so too does he see aesthetic theory and its theorist as necessarily nurturing their own repellent concepts. As discussed previously, it is not uncommon for the reader to become disconcerted by Adorno's style, however, read as a whole, it becomes clearer that Adorno's style alone is precisely constructed so as to alert the reader to the very paradoxes (and, thus, problems) present in the paradox of the so-called modern/postmodern condition.

To answer the second question – that concerning the role of Adorno's theory within this element – I propose that this work attempts to embody Adorno's sense of paradox in ambiguity. The word "fridges" was delivered serendipitously; likewise the object itself – the refrigerator – has chance determining its aesthetic and relationship to thought. Taking advantage of this chance, I was able to forge a link between the object as relative to both the rest of the works that comprised the installation, and Adorno's positing, within art, a 'negated' antithetical content.

This negative and oppositional force within the work of art is concomitant with Beuys's theories of transformation (or, read: trans-figurative, trans-formative, trans-mittive, trans-active) that determined his use of material. Beuys's work with tallow as a *Plastik* medium could be seen as emblematic of Adorno's thoughts on negated and oppositional forces within the work of art. In the case of a work like *Stühl mitt Fett* (Fig. 57), change of temperature is an ever-present 'threat' to the aesthetic tension Beuys creates with the wedge of fat.

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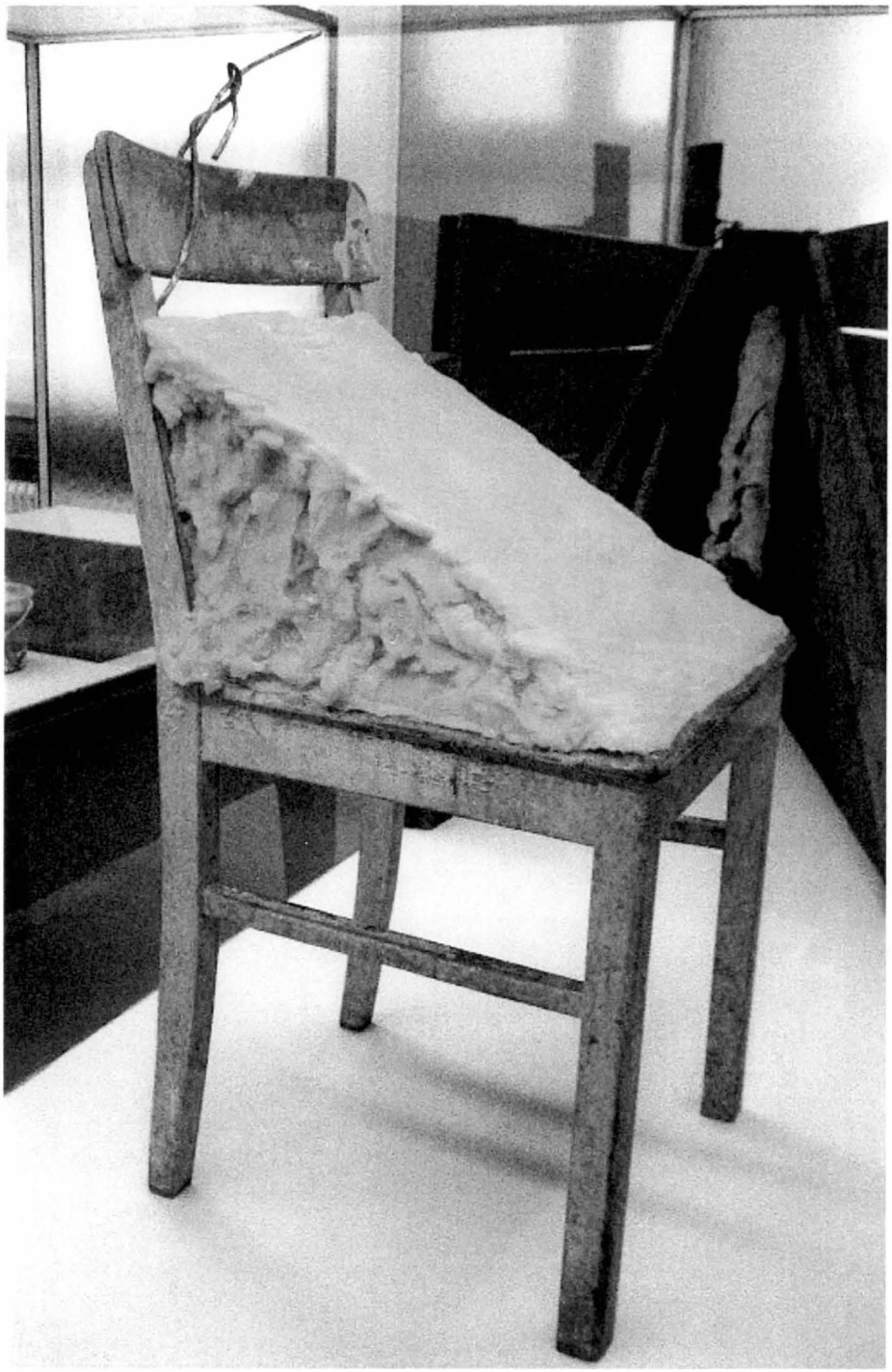
[520] Though I have already referred to the first quote examined here, I would like to repeat them for the benefit of the reader. All are present on p. 1 of *Aesthetic Theory* in 'Art, Society, Aesthetics ' In order of reference, they are: "It is self-evident that noting concerning art is self-evident anymore "; "For absolute freedom in art, always limited to a particular, comes into contradiction with the perennial unfreedom of the whole "; "All efforts to restore art by giving it a social function...are doomed Indeed, art's autonomy shows signs of blindness."



(Fig. 57) Joseph Beuys *Stühl mitt Fett* (1963) Mixed media. Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt

If the temperature increases, the tallow softens. If the temperature decreases, the tallow hardens. Though it might appear as interpretive clutching-at-straws, this sense of negativity from within served not only as a model for understanding Adorno's theory, but was conducive to linking the disparately spread works involved in the creation of *Fridges*. Indeed, that a refrigerator's sole use is the preservation of foodstuffs in cold

served as an ironic link, not, simply, to Beuys's use of materials effected by temperature change, but more precisely to the stove in *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*. Though one is used for heating and the other for cooling, both units serve to either maintain or alter the condition of a product. Each is representative of the extremes between which we find some balance, and both, I contend, can be viewed as formations of Adorno's theory.

It is no coincidence that the refrigerator in *Fridges* is faulty and unplugged; remember, Beuys's stove was, likewise, faulty and unplugged. The severance of power to the refrigerator (or stove) is a denial of its potential to serve its purpose. Here, again, is a cyclical conceptual link between Beuys and Adorno. Of course, the time and space between the chance words chosen as part of the 1996 performance and the 2008 installation is not filled with meaning granted entirely by either Adorno or Beuys. It has, however, assumed meaning by the artist's active role in the shaping of these concepts, or thoughts, into form. This is reminiscent of Jacques Ranciere's musings as presented in *The Future of the Image*:

> In this new regime, there are no longer appropriate subjects for art...It is precisely this double identity of opposites that the aesthetic revolution counter-poses to the representative model, by subsuming artistic phenomena under the new concept of aesthetics. On the one hand, it counter-poses to the norms of representative action an absolute power of *making* on the part of the artwork, pertaining to its own law of production and self-demonstration. But on the other, it identifies the power of this unconditioned production with absolute passivity This identity of opposites is summarized in Kant's theory of genius. Genius is the active power of nature, opposed to any norm, which is its own norm. But a genius is also someone who does not know what he is doing or how he does it. What is deduced from this in Schelling and Hegel is a conceptualization of art as the unity of a conscious process and an unconscious process. The aesthetic revolution establishes this identity of knowledge and ignorance, acting and suffering, as the very definition of art.[521]

As the viewer stands before this station, she or he might find these thoughts resonating, for the significance of this aesthetic revolution are evident in the competing conceptual forces present within.

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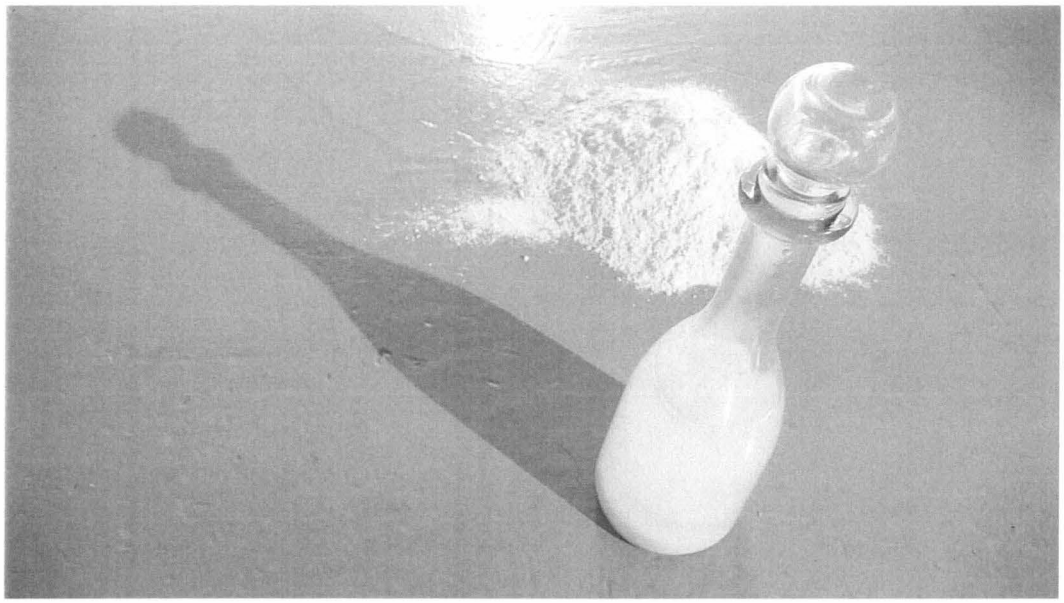
[521] Jacques Ranciere *The Future of the Image* Trans. Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2007) p. 119.

4.2.3 *Arsenic* and *Dust*



(Fig. 58) Foreground: *Arsenic* (2008) Glass bottle, water, paint. 340 mm x 80 mm circumference.
Background: *Dust* (2008) Powdered modelling clay. Dimensions variable
Photograph by Kevin Leong

That these two elements are in such close proximity (as to appear as a single work) is an aesthetic decision. Initially, they remain representationally distinct; however, as I shall explain, they are located within the installation as a single station. If this seems unusual, note the wending philosophical and aesthetic path traversed thus far, and the questions asked of the conceptual and actual permanence of art objects by both Beuys and Darboven. I intend, during the course of this section, to explicate more precisely the transgression from division to union, but first, I will give a simple, descriptive outlining of the construction of this particular station.

One part is simply a glass jar with a glass stopper, filled with an opaque liquid that is made to represent arsenic. Arsenic is a toxic compound, here (re)presented in its liquid form. The other part is a small mound of white dust (in this case powdered plaster). Beyond the immediate relationship between the works and the things they represent, there is the secondary relationship between the works, the things, and the respective words proffered by the audience – *Arsenic* and *Dust*. This is the case with all of the works (with the exception of exception is *Christianity*, but we will come to that in turn) and object-representing words featured in *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008*. For now, it will suffice to recognise this representational trinity in simple terms,

despite the philosophical notions of representation it entails, as understood, historically, emanating from Plato.[522] Again, we must note the serendipitous source of this work; namely, the words, taken randomly, that have forged the basic formal qualities of the sculptural objects. However, the deliberation that has gone into making these words and their representational forms vehicles for thought, is the point of interest here. This section will begin with a theoretical dissection of the work *Arsenic*.

How or why this word had entered the mind of the audience participant will almost certainly remain unanswered, and speculation as to how or why, fruitless. It would be theoretically fortuitous to learn that the choice was based on the Greek word meaning masculine, or potent – *arsenikon*. Of course, presenting imagined scenarios distracts from the authority of the text, however it serves to expose certain potential risks any author might encounter when searching with too much desperation for symbolic representation in works. This is particularly the case when analysing conceptual art, which necessarily demands of the viewer a deeply contemplative approach. Thus, forming meaning from disparate locations or thoughts – in this instance from the Greek word *arsenikon* to a bottle of opaque liquid in a 2008 installation in Hobart, via a chance occurrence during a 1996 performance in Brisbane – while sadly typical of art theory methodology, must *itself* be cautiously undertaken and reviewed. The great advantage of writing a first-hand account of the process of creating a work of conceptual art (and thus the importance of this chapter within the thesis) is that it dispels (or is at the very least a cautionary reminder of the risks at hand when engaging with) certain speculative and myth-forming tendencies of the theoretical interpreter. In this instance, however, *Arsenic* is a simply constructed physical representation of the word in its descriptive context. The aesthetic qualities of this work are enhanced with simple techniques of lighting and location, so the work's inherent minimalism and isolation allow the work to impact on the viewer more subtly than the other works.

However, the representative significance of a poisonous substance does, deliberately, hark back to both Beuys and Adorno. In aesthetic terms, the bottle in *Arsenic* is reminiscent of the jars of unidentified/unidentifiable liquid located throughout the Block Beuys. In conceptual/symbolic terms the 'poison' contained within the bottle recalls the

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[522] "The representation theory was the first major theory of art, doubtless because of its natural appeal. It has been the longest-lasting and most widely embraced of all art theories. In some form, it has attracted numerous philosophers from Plato on " E.E. Sleinis *Art and Freedom* (Urbana. University of Illinois Press, 2003) p 16

ongoing and elemental Beuysian dialectic of unity in diversity: life/death, nutrition/poison, East/West, religion/science, and so on. Like the use of iodine in *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*, here, in *Arsenic*, we find an amalgam of potential for healing and for poisoning. This, in turn, reflects Adorno's dictum of opposition as the foundation for a *negative* dialectic, conceptually engaging with, or in dialogue with, the textually adorned refrigerator (*Fridges*), reminding the viewer of an art *containing that which it repulses.*

The 'dust' (in this instance consisting purely of common modeling plaster) is of dual representational nature; on the one hand, referring to the 1996 performance, while on the other, presenting a link to concerns regarding the relationship between thought and form. This is an ideal point at which to reiterate, that, amidst the theoretical ties that bind this work, there remains a concern for an aesthetic forged to invite the viewer into the visual system. Countless artists have attacked the foundations of modern aesthetics, sacrificing any skerrick of sensuality for the benefit of their agendas. However, this work observes the shift from the critical urgency evident in the 1996 performance, to the current recognition that this surge of anti-aestheticism has left in its wake a critical culture bereft of the inviting qualities, apparently betrayed by late modernism. Measuring the success or failure of these attempts to test the limits for introducing aesthetic subtleties into the realm of the conceptual remains empirically problematic; however, highlighting this conceptual foundation avails the viewer of a significant interpretive tool.

This is not a claim to forming any pioneering aesthetic agenda. Thierry de Duve has been identified and recognised for his significant contribution:

> ...to freeing aesthetics from its identification with late modernism and thus its status as the antithesis of ethical value from a post-modern viewpoint...Where for advocates of the post-modern anti-aesthetic it seemed clear that the privileging of sensuous affect in art was at odds with ethical criticality and political project, today a range of practices and theoretical positions, are, in different, and often antagonistic ways, seeking to overcome this opposition.[523]

To expand on this, consider the 1996 performance as an act of 'ethical criticality' (say, by considering the notions of taboo and risk, concerning the body) and/or a 'political

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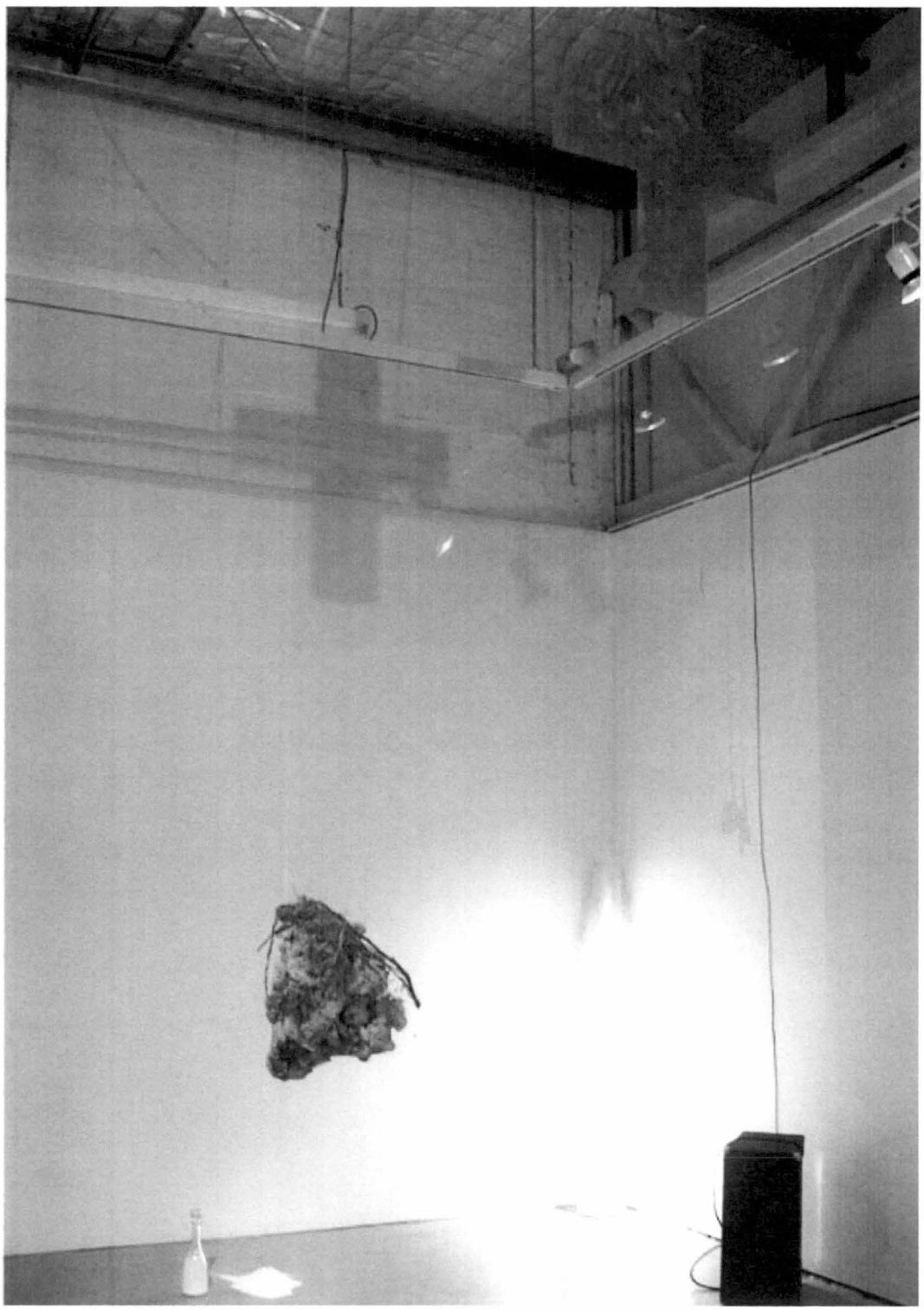
[523] Diarmuid Costello and Dominic Willsdon (eds) *The Life and Death of Images: Ethics and Aesthetics* (London Tate Publishing, 2008) p 10.

project' (by considering the participatory and egalitarian elements of the action), and the 2008 installation a re-engagement with 'sensuous affect.' This re-engagement works along several lines. Adjustable, technical responses are produced by arrangement between the objects and the lighting in the gallery space. Taking into account the dimensions of the room, the colour of the walls and floors, the artist should be able to assemble a well-considered body of work in the way she or he expects. With lighting, the tonal 'rhythm' between light and shade offer great scope for aesthetic manoeuvring. Bringing these matters to the fore at this juncture, highlights aspects of this small arrangement that may be overlooked amidst the clamour of philosophical quandary elsewhere.

Arsenic and *Dust*, as a united element, is intended as a 'sensuous' work; the clean, defined and reflective curves of the bottle beside the powdery asymmetry of the dust. The stillness of the opaque liquid contained in the bottle the antithesis of the dust. Wholly at the mercy of the elements it remains, still. This tension is designed to bring a meditative calm while sustaining a critical quality availed to the inquiring mind.

4.2.4 *Christianity*



(Fig. 59) Andrew Wear *Christianity* (2008) Plastic glass, modelling plaster, paper, dried grass, enamel paint.
1100 mm x 2200 mm.
Photograph by Kevin Leong

(Fig. 60) Detail: *Christianity* (2008) Photograph by Kevin Leong

Christianity is – literally – the centrepiece of *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008*. The foundation surface for the work is a sheet of acrylic glass 1100mm x 2200mm in dimension, suspended approximately 1200mm from the floor. The following observations concerning positions on the work are made from the perspective of the viewer entering the gallery.

On the top, right-hand corner of the sheet is a painted cruciform. Due to the transparency of the surface, the shape is visible from the front and the rear (high-gloss, gold, enamel paint at the front; matt, white, house-paint on the reverse) of the suspended sheet. In the bottom, left hand corner hangs a mass of mauve-coloured plaster and dry grass. The gravitational suspense created by the organic mass against the sheer sheen of the acrylic forms (as does the relationship between the materials in *Arsenic* and *Dust*) a dichotomous aesthetic. Moreover, its attachment to the glass is suggestive of a parasitical relationship. While this was not strictly the intention, this dichotomous display was devised to evoke the difficult relationship between contemporary art and religion as imagined in Beuys and Adorno. That is, the compressed mass of plaster and grass, with its almost 'contemptuous' construction and disregard for formal beauty, becomes representative of the anti-aesthetic turn (most) evident in Beuys. While the cross is stylistically similar to the Beuysian crucíform that remained a constant mark on his art and action,[524] here, I intended a visual representation, not only of the relationship between modernity and religion (as marked, almost chronologically, through Beuys, Kiefer and Darboven), but of the critical continuum that shaped the 'post-modern turn' against institutional religion. The use of gold paint for the frontal form, and white house paint for the reverse, represents the ongoing perception of the Christian Church as being either dualistic in ambition or dually perceived. While this polarity of reception was heightened in the aftermath of the Second World War, it has been an historical constant, and remains so. In culture, questions of religiosity and spirituality are considered anywhere from ambivalence to determination, and answered with anything from respect to contempt. Irrespective, religion remains a significant *other* in the consideration of art:

> For some people, art simply *is* religious...For others, modern art...*cannot* be religious because that would undo the project of modernism by going against its own sense of itself. Modernism was predicated on a series of rejections and refusals, among them the 19th century sense that art – that is, academic art, and mainly painting – is an appropriate vehicle for religious stories.[525]

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[524] Reference to FIU...add images, etc

[525] James Elkins *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (Routledge: New York 2004) p. ix

There are countless extensive and comprehensive critical inquiries into this relationship, and it would be a great injustice to undermine this work with brevity and generalisation. Rather, the reader will benefit from an explication of the particular relationship the artist has with this theory, and the imagining of the current condition.

The symbolism of the cross is, in this work, a more temperate acknowledgement of faith than Darboven presents. The cross in *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*, adorned with photographs and placed incongruously in the sparseness of the gallery space, is bereft of any sensuality or beatific aesthetic. While her commitment to rational and systematic art-making implies a scepticism, her playfulness with the form is more suggestive of a *lack of* concern, rather than an *informed* concern. Beuys's melancholy aesthetic (particularly evident during the years represented in *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956-1964*) is, while not conceptually similar, a more evident source. However, the distinction between the visual and the conceptual must remain present in the assessment of any works that share one or other quality. Indeed, there are many concerns in common with Kiefer, who remains a significant conceptual source despite the fact that there are virtually no aesthetic qualities common between *Notung* and *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008.*

Kiefer's critical approach to his subject-matter is a guide to the philosophical questions raised herein. While Beuys and Darboven present more idiosyncratic critiques, Kiefer's ambiguously crafted sets enable the viewer's own reading, irrespective of the artist's intention. While *Christianity* in no way resembles Kiefer stylistically, its attempt to present a tension between two representations – one symbolic, one amorphously asymbolic – asks the viewer to consider, and respond to, their own questions of faith.

Following the visual and conceptual depicting of the artist presented at the first station (*1996 / 2008*), this work shifts, so as to embrace the 'diminished role of the artist' as deployed by Kiefer. Whether or not this brings interpretive clarity, is arguable. On the one hand it enables and empowers the subject as a critical force in a hermeneutic cycle; on the other, having the direct referential form or input from the artist secures certain meaning as represented in its production. Contemporary art practice, and its capacity for conceptual conflation (as outlined as critical to this thesis' progression) means that questions concerning the validity of multiple viewpoints might be addressed within a

single work of art, able, as they now are to inhabit entire rooms, or indeed, entire galleries. Thus, a 1996 performance during which this conceptually loaded word was tattooed permanently onto the body, and the subsequent design and construction of an installation 12 years later, present multiple conditions of subjectivity between four gallery walls. As the centrepiece to the installation, *Christianity*'s transferral of these events to a contemplative form transforms these experiences into a work from whence the viewer might consider their subjectivity as relative to faith; be it in a God, or in one's self.

4.2.5 *Parsnip*

(Fig. 61) Andrew Wear *Parsnip* (2008). Parsnips, cardboard box. Photograph by Kevin Leong

> Describing – that is the last ambition of an absurd thought.
>
> - Albert Camus *The Myth of Sisyphus*

There is undoubtedly a comedic quality to the presence of a box of parsnips beneath the austere presence of *Christianity*. Likewise, of all the words proffered during the 1996 performance, *Parsnip* was greeted (and continues to be greeted) with the most mirthful response. One might intuit that the participant plucked the most ridiculous or absurd

object immediately available from her vocabulary. However, in keeping with the commitment to perform the actions according to my guidelines as decided beforehand, I proceeded to inscribe the letters to form the word onto my body.

When constructing the sculptural representation of this word and the associated action, it was unclear as to what role this particular moment played in the performance. Upon extensive consideration, I deferred to the works of 'theorists of *the absurd*' to develop certain existential ideas that had been shaped during the formation of *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008* that were particularly poignant here. Of these works, Thomas Nagel's essay "The Absurd" from his book *Mortal Questions*, and the collection of essays by Albert Camus' under the title *The Myth of Sisyphus*, touched on aspects of the experience.

Even when applying the rigorous theoretical framework Hanne Darboven applies to any arbitrary or absurd points of reference within her work, it became apparent that I had no such case here. I decided that the most accurate formation of the thoughts I had come to associate with this moment in the performance was to place, unadorned, the very item the word signified. The only variation (the presentation of multiple objects as distinct from the singular description offered) was determined by the aesthetic requirements of visual presence. Thus, an entire case of the cream-coloured root vegetable were emptied into a brown cardboard box and placed beneath the right-hand corner of *Christianity*.

During the course of the installation, the box of vegetables served to alleviate certain conceptual tensions that were evident elsewhere, tensions that either aggravated or intrigued the gallery-goers. Just as the word had served to bring absurd levity to the performance in 1996, so too the box of parsnips that represented this word and this action, had come to act as a peculiar interregnum to the installation. This then came to represent a meaning, and play a role, unto itself; something that has thus far remained removed from this thesis' concerns. The absurd, and the comedic qualities *absurdism* brings to art, has been a critical feature of Dadaism, Surrealism and, to a lesser extent – almost by necessity – Conceptual Art. Perhaps more than any other element within the collective works that make up the installation, *Parsnip* might, inadvertently, serve to capture the very post-philosophical qualities that Mike Parr considers serendipitously evident in the closure found in his own practice. Furthermore, the gradual deterioration and decomposition that affected this work acted as a secondary, unexpected and

unpredictable feature that lent the work a quality greatly removed from the original utterance of the word in 1996. First, I will outline the philosophical texts considering notions of *the absurd* that informed my understanding of certain aspects of the 1996 performance and the 2008 installation, with particular reference to *Parsnip*.

*

> When a person finds himself in an absurd situation, he will usually attempt to change it, by modifying his aspirations, or by trying to bring reality into better accord with them, or by removing himself from the situation entirely. We are not always willing or able to extricate ourselves from a position whose absurdity has become clear to us...Many people's lives are absurd, temporarily or permanently, for conventional reasons having to do with their particular ambitions, circumstances, and personal relations. If there is a philosophical sense of absurdity, however, it must arise from the perception of something universal – some respect in which pretension and reality clash for us all.[526]

Thomas Nagel's complex assessment of what constitutes *the absurd* appears at odds with the pure *absurdism* of a box of parsnips exhibited on the floor of an art gallery. Irrespective of what levels of philosophical quandary are applied to this object, it is unlikely that anything more serious than a moment's contemplation befit such an object. However, between the very first consideration of this object's formation and its actual formation, the works of Thomas Nagel and Albert Camus shaped an understanding of contingency that became increasingly informative when considering the experience of the 1996 performance.

It might seem an interpretive stretch to consider a box of vegetables bound to existential questions of mortality, however this particular station possessed certain organic qualities, absent elsewhere in the installation, that extended its representational force beyond its immediate visual simplicity. During the course of the 22 days the installation was in place, the parsnips altered their form; from firm and fresh as at the time of purchase, to limp and stale, wrinkled by dehydration, and sprouting small shoots from the stem-base. This deterioration tempered the humour implicit in the work, recalling the withered forms of Beuys's installation. Furthermore, this demonstration of organic contingency on a microcosmic scale added a degree of gravity to the work's aesthetic.

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[526] Thomas Nagel *Mortal Questions* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p. 13

In the initial stages of design, the works of Nagel informed my thoughts concerning *the absurd*. In particular, it is Nagel's prescription of irony as "antidote...for the absurdity of life"[527] that forged a link with prior interests in ironical representation:

> In ordinary life a situation is absurd when it includes a conspicuous discrepancy between pretension or aspiration and reality: someone gives a complicated speech in support of a motion that has already been passed; a notorious criminal is made president of a major philanthropic foundation; you declare your love over the telephone to a recorded announcement; as you are being knighted, your pants fall down...If *sub specie aeternitatis* there is no reason to believe that anything matters, then that does not matter either, and we can approach our absurd lives with irony instead of heroism and despair. [528]

However, beyond this link, I found little in Nagel that was compatible with the particular understanding of *the absurd* I experienced throughout the course of shaping my work. Jeffrey Gordon echoes my doubts elsewhere, perhaps most succinctly in his article "Nagel or Camus on the Absurd?" Discussing Nagel's essay, Gordon declares:

> It is an essay of considerable philosophical interest, although it may be of greater interest still to the cultural historian. If the views Nagel expresses have general currency, they may be taken as a sign of a new stage of our spiritual crisis, the stage in which, weary of our mourning, we try to persuade ourselves of the insignificance of the mourned.[529]

Gordon unpicks Nagel's argument, while crediting Camus' writings as superior 'response' to *the absurd*:

> Nagel finds Camus' defiant stand both self-pitying and histrionic. Arguing that Camus' response betrays a sense of self-importance incompatible with the novelist-philosopher's acknowledgement of our insignificance, Nagel recommends instead that we greet the absurdity of our lives with an ironic smile. I think Nagel is wrong in his contention that Camus' rebellious stance is inconsistent with his (Camus') reading of the human situation...[530]

Further research forged solidarity with Gordon's understanding, and a theoretical

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[527] Jonathan Westphal and Christopher Cherry "Is Life Absurd?" *Philosophy*, Vol 65, No. 252 (April 1990) p 202

[528] op. cit., pp. 13-23

[529] Jeffrey Gordon. "Nagel or Camus on the Absurd?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol 45, No. 1 (Sep., 1984), p. 16

[530] ibid.

engagement with Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus.* While the lyrical qualities of Camus' writing appealed, his perception of the existential question of *the absurd* seemed less cluttered, and more familiar with the work's design. In Arnold Hinchliffe's collected works on *the absurd*, he defines four sources from whence Camus believed the sensation of *the absurd* was drawn:

> 1. The mechanical nature of many people's lives may lead them to question the value and purpose of their existence; this is an intimation of absurdity.
> 2. An acute sense of time passing, or the recognition that time is a destructive force.
> 3. A sense of being left in an alien world. Camus suggests that a world which can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But in a world from which illusions and insight have been suddenly removed man feels himself a stranger. At its most intense this sense of alienation is carried to the point of nausea, when familiar objects normally 'domesticated' by names – such as stone or tree – are also robbed of their familiarity.
> 4. A sense of isolation from other beings.[531]

Camus considers any one (or combination of any number) of these sources, as likely to enhance the sensation of existential absurdity. The box of parsnips – for both their incongruity and changing form – are representative of a number of these conditions. The most distinct experience the viewer will have when encountering the object that engender an encounter with Camus' sense of *the absurd* is the 'sense of time passing' and of objects 'robbed of their familiarity.' Even though the work is objectively titled, the encounter with the work outside the familiar conditions of either production or consumption establishes an uneasy interpretive condition. With a broader reading of the element within the greater installation, the issues of 'value and purpose of existence' and 'isolation from other beings' come to bear on the question of the relationship the artist has with the work of art and the viewer. Thus, despite the deliberate sense of humour encouragingly drawn from this experience, there remains an underlying existentialism to this work's exploration of *the absurd* and the role this notion has played in the construction of *Parsnip.*

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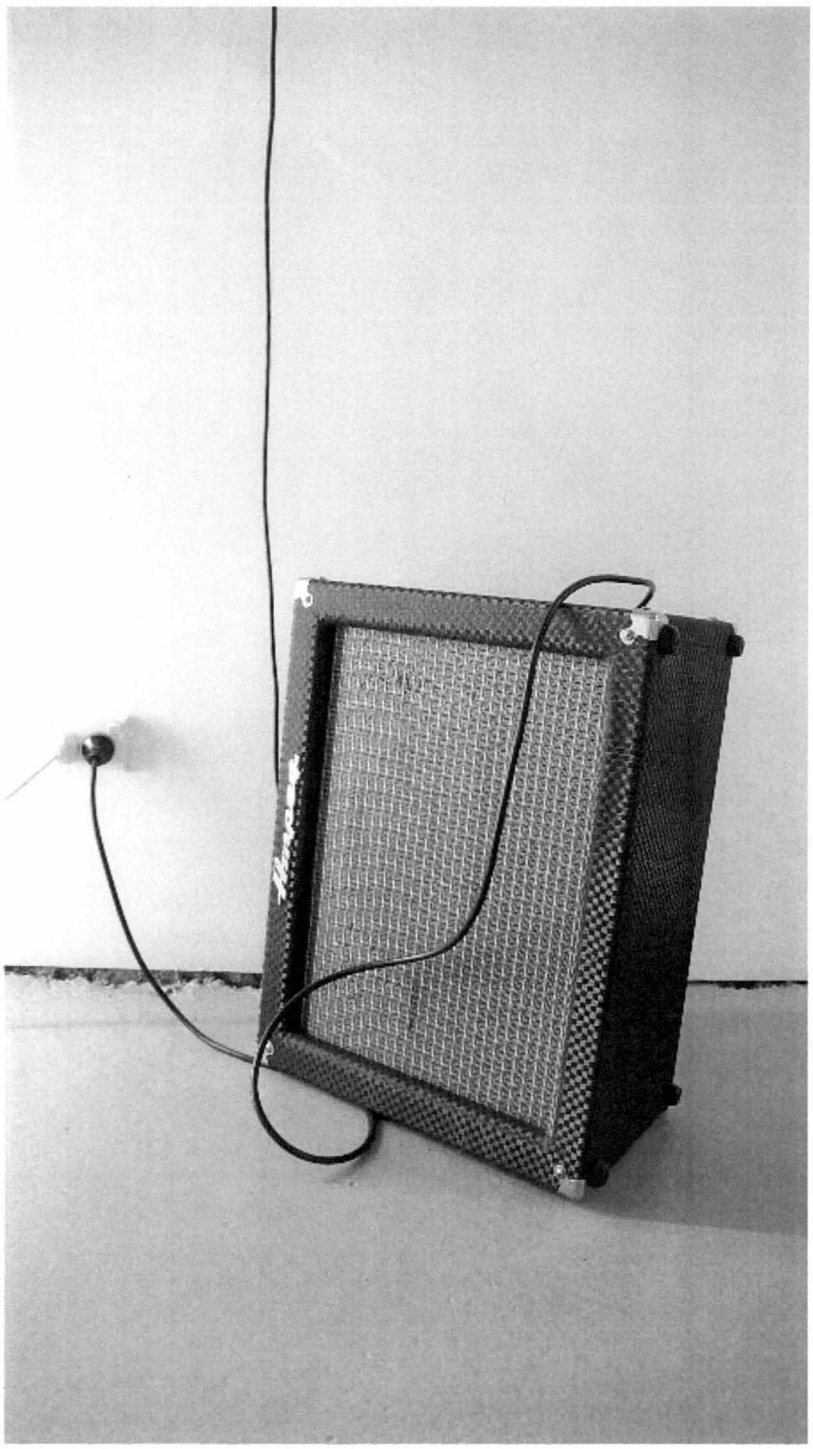
[531]Arnold P. Hinchliffe *The Absurd* (Methuen & Co. Ltd· London, 1969) pp 35-36

4.2.6 *So what of Adorno now?*

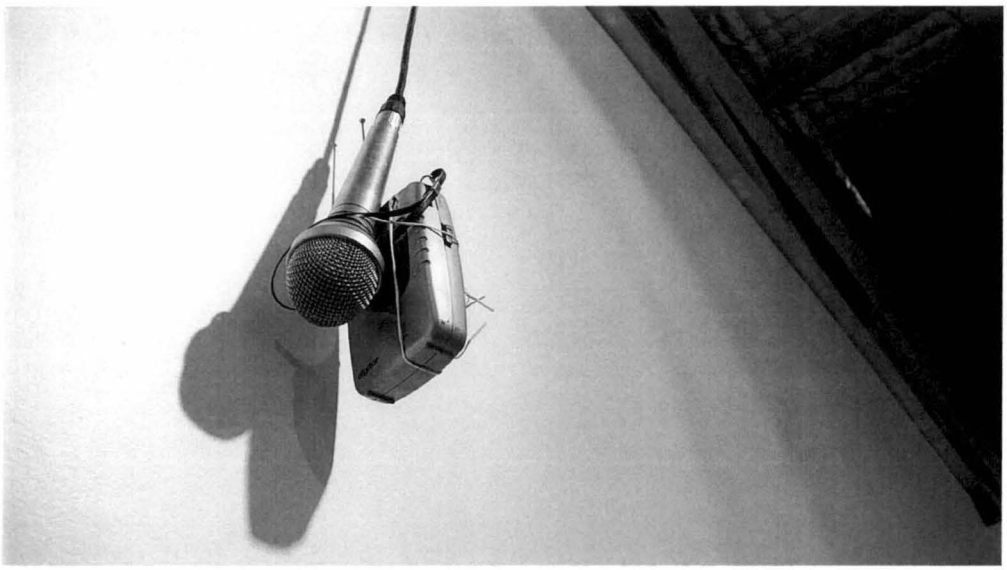
The four works presented here as a single work – *So what of Adorno now?* – are, in effect, a smaller installation within the greater installation, shaped by their conceptual unity. Though quite varied in both style and construction, the four works are, when combined, presented so as to provide physical and conceptual closure to the installation. It is important, while viewing this sub-installation, to recognise that none of the works or their constituent parts refer explicitly to the 1996 performance. That is (unlike the five works presented as previous to this), it is neither drawn from, nor informed by, the actions of, or encounters during the performance. The work's title signals the shift that resulted from the ongoing consideration of Adorno's theory at the start of the design and construction, to the reconsideration that took place during its finalisation. While this discordance might not be aligned with the traditions of art practice that determine a more conceptually unified approach to the final outcome, I chose to highlight this shift for precisely the opposite reason; that is, as *concept and form* enact mutual transformation, I wanted to represent this shift as present within the work, thus eliciting evidence of how this change occurred. Thus, the shift from the original aesthetic choices and aspects of the work retain this original theoretical impulse, the final amalgam grew to extend beyond the original reading of Adorno's philosophical domain.

When viewed from the centre of the gallery, the elements that constitute this work are (from left to right): an amplifier, resting on its side; seven panes of glass inscribed with black, white and red hand-written text; a microphone, suspended by a lead (connected to the amplifier) and bound with wire to a portable radio; and an oil painting of abstract forms on paper, pinned to the wall; its bottom curled where it meets the floor. The visual field (and the disparate forms within) is given an expanded aesthetic dimension by the audible crackle and hum emitting from the portable-radio. The microphone picks up noises from the radio it is bound to, and transmits them to the amplifier, where a fractionally delayed reproduction creates a somewhat charged sonic surround. As these works are conceptually (and, in the case of the amplifier, the microphone and the radio, *literally*) bound, this section demands a more interwoven consideration of the works, and the relationship they have to each other, when bringing forth the theoretical underpinnings of their construction. On a greater scale, this applies to *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008* in its entirety; however, I must stress this distinction

here as I enter this final study, to distinguish it from the previous five explicitly performance-related studies.



(Fig. 62) Detail: *So what of Adorno now?* (2008) Photograph Kevin Leong.



(Fig. 63) Detail: *So what of Adorno now?* (2008) Photograph Kevin Leong.

The amplifier/microphone/radio combination remained activated during the entire course of the installation, with viewers encouraged to alter the received frequency on the radio. This created the dual effect of aural and kinetic change within the piece, as the act of changing the tuning not only altered the frequencies and the resulting sounds, but caused the arrangement to swing in a pendulous manner after being handled. This action was most prevalent during the opening of the exhibition, when there were significant numbers of people tending to this task. Engaging with the work of art was a conscious extension of the principles underlying the 1996 performance, however the conceptual framework for this work was more particular in its philosophical structure than the performance. At once self-referential and ex-referential, these objects combined to shape a response to Adorno's theory of late (or, alternatively 'advanced' or 'monopolised') capitalism. The parasitical closed circuit of cultural production as envisioned by Adorno is explained here:

> When 'Life in the late capitalist era' is described as a 'constant initiation rite' the emphasis falls on 'constant'. Unlike a literal initiation rite, this initiation rite is not one which once completed allows a secure place within social relations, but one which must be undergone again and again, because the threat of expulsion is renewed again and again. It is this negative or dialectical anthropology of late capitalism which is worked out in Adorno's theory of the culture industry...[532]

While Adorno's theories concerning late capitalism have succumbed to increasing critical

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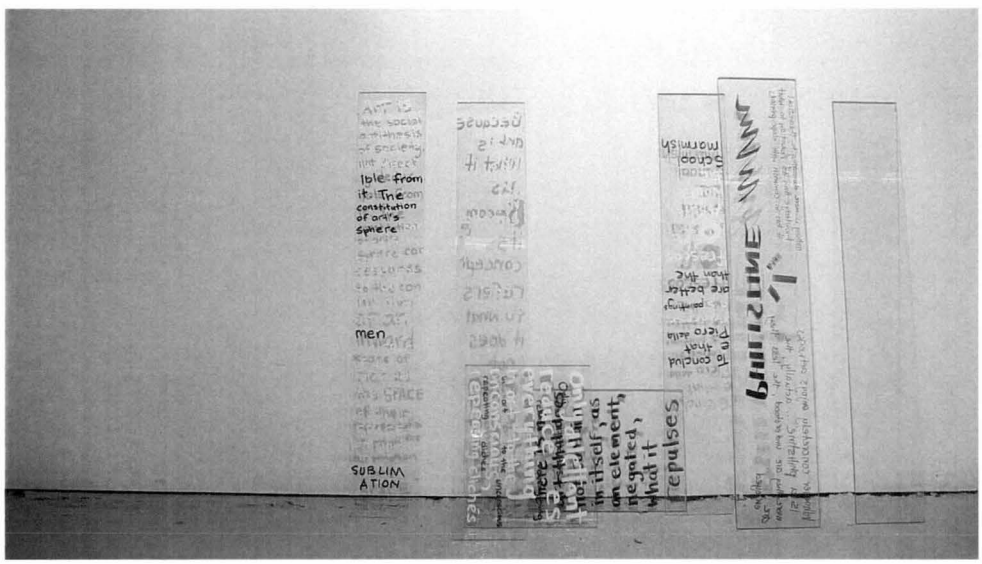
[532] Jarvis, Simon *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* Cambridge: Polity Press. 1998. p. 71

dismissal, I considered the aesthetic elements of his theory[533] of interest, determining the construction of this work as a representation of this theory. Furthermore, while unconscious of such a shift before considering Adorno's theory within the limits of the installation, there is, it appears, a re-engaging underway:

> This rehabilitation of Adorno appears presently to be ascendant, after the long-established orthodoxy which held him *bete noir* in view of some of his more reductive and polemical writings on popular culture...[534]

The mechanical 'loop' created by the link between microphone and amplified deliberately overstates the parasitical qualities of late capitalism evident in Adorno's thesis, however this is countered by the objects present elsewhere within *So what of Adorno now?* that seek to represent the un-doing and re-doing of Adorno's theory, and, for that matter, become representative of the grander narrative of hermeneutics. While *So what of Adorno now?* displays (a fragment of) Adorno's theory, it also – in title and content – asks the viewer to consider contextual factors that determine the shifting reception of theory. This 'mapping of trends,' while serious in its intent, is also bound to a playful aesthetic that aims for visual *and* conceptual appeal.



(Fig. 64) Detail: *So what of Adorno now?* (2008) Photograph Kevin Leong.

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[533] For an expanded analyses of this idea, see Rüdiger Bubner "Can Theory Become Aesthetic? On a principal theme of Adorno's philosophy" in Simon Jarvis (ed) *Theodor W. Adorno: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2007) pp. 14-40

[534] Georgina Born "Against Negation, for a Politics of Cultural Production: Adorno, aesthetics, the social" ibid. p. 141

When intertwined with Adorno's grander narrative, this re-engagement serves (here) to map Adorno's reception as relative to the installation. I argue, in this manipulation of *concept and form*, that Adorno's theories, while criticised for their content, can hold methodological relevance if translated into contemporary cultural form. The seven panes of glass, each inscribed with short tracts from *Aesthetic Theory*, serve to familiarise the viewer with the theoretical reference first encountered with *Fridges*. Indeed, the same quote – "There is no art that does not contain within itself, as an element, negated, what it repulses" – appears again, here, on the small, central panel of glass. I will present the extracts as they appear, from left to right, and explain their relevance to *So what of Adorno now?* before closing with an overview of its representational role in the greater installation. The first passage comes from the chapter "Art, Society, Aesthetics":

> Art is the social antithesis of society, not directly deducible from it. The constitution of art's sphere corresponds to the constitution of an inward space of men as the space of their representation: A priori the constitution of this space participates in sublimation.[535]

This passage is taken from the first (or what might loosely be referred to as the introductory) part of *Aesthetic Theory*. Here, Adorno outlines his defence of a theory of art as autonomous representation. The force and determination of Adorno's language throughout this chapter determined the positioning of this panel upright, and located slightly distanced from the other panes of glass that are gathered together. Intermittent use of black ink amidst the white suggests emphasis on certain words, however this reading is rendered questionable when the viewer considers precisely what significance there might be in the words chosen. In the first instance, a fragment of a sentence is altered, however the words *men* and *sublimation* have been written in black, a clearer reference to gendered and/or philosophical terminology. While barely noticeable amidst the mass of visual data, it should be clear to the viewer (particularly after the dissection of *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983*) that even the deftest touches carry meaning. I will explicate the aesthetic decisions and design of this arrangement in conclusion; in the meantime, I will maintain focus on these passages from *Aesthetic Theory*. The second glass panel is inscribed with the following, also from "Art, Society, Aesthetics":

> Because art is what it has become, its concept refers to what it does not contain.[536]

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[535] op. cit , Adorno *Aesthetic Theory* p. 9

Typical of Adorno's chiastic structuring, this sentence serves to summarise a central theoretical impulse while acting as a prop to the installation's conceptual backdrop. In order to expand in Adorno's thought, I shall include critical passages from either side of this quote:

> If...one wanted in the usual philosophical fashion categorically to distinguish the so-called question of origin – as that of art's essence – from the question of art's historical origin, that would amount only to turning the concept of origin arbitrarily against the usual sense of the word. The definition of art is at every point indicated by what art once was, but it is legitimated only by what art became with regard to what it wants to, and perhaps can, become...The specifically artistic in art must be derived concretely from its other; that alone would fulfill the demands of a materialistic-dialectic aesthetics.[537]

Adorno continues his dialectical march, albeit negatively geared. Note, however, that in turning the inscribed side of the glass to face the wall, the viewer encounters the text reversed. With this simple design, the text is actualised in sculptural form. While the reference to Adorno's theory is poignant, the decision is as much informed by Adorno's stylistic and aesthetic choices. Implicit in this whole arrangement is the notion that there are qualities in Adorno's work that remain valuable in the consideration of cultural production.

The third panel of glass, placed on its side, but with the text presented, facing out and readable, has a rather provocative sentence written on it:

> Only dilettantes reduce everything in art to the unconscious, repeating clichés[538]

This pointed remark, while, in its original context directed at psychoanalytical methodology of art interpretation, is perhaps more useful, in this context, as a signal to trans-disciplinary art interpretation. After all, Adorno does not have an overarching objection to psychoanalytical readings of art:

> The psychoanalytic thesis, for instance, that music is a defense against the threat of paranoia, does indeed for the most part hold true clinically, yet it says nothing about the quality and content of a particular composition.[539]

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[536] op. cit., p. 3

[537] ibid.

[538] op. cit , p 11

The panel, also pointedly positioned so as to represent (and be interpreted) according to Adorno's dictum, teases the viewer's acceptance or refutation of such grand statements. Laid across the fourth pane of glass (inscribed with the same passage painted on the refrigerator here in black ink with the same passage as painted on the refrigerator), this panel works to visually conflate Adorno's theory, in form, enacting a revision of his aesthetic reasoning. As I have already elaborated on this text in its original context in the section devoted to the work *Fridges*, I will only consider the significance of its deliberate repetition within *So what of Adorno now?* In the title of the work alone, the viewer is made conscious of a re-evaluative approach. Thus, the phrase, now appearing in two distinct locations within the installation, becomes interpretable as having meaning dependent on context. However, the unlikelihood of a phrase, so self-evidently presented, having such multiplicitous meaning means that the viewer is forced to re-evaluate its importance. This deliberate ambiguity again serves to make unclear the artists motives and clouds interpretation. This tug-of-war between interpretive repellence and temptation can be exclusive, however for those drawn to the theoretical and visual interplay, such methods are designed to enrich the greater project. The fifth pane of glass is, like the first, alternately inscribed in black and white ink. The unified passage reads:

> ...to conclude that Piero della Francesca's paintings are better than the frescoes of Assisi would be schoolmarmish.[540]

This passage, extracted from the depths of the chapter titled "Universal and Particular" is incongruous amidst the more brazen bursts of text marked on the surrounding glass panels. This passage was chosen for a number of reasons, not least for its incongruity and the deliberate theoretical disturbance this affects. Otherwise, it presents the following: first, an historical point of reference far removed from the confines of the gallery space and an interesting insight into the historical sources Adorno turns to for his proclamations. Second, it realises Hullot-Kernor's claims and Zuidervaart's experiences (see pages 22-23 of this thesis) detailing the possibility of 'diving' into *Aesthetic Theory* at virtually any point, and extracting something from within its "evocative prose."[541] The sixth pane of glass is distinctive for a number of reasons. It is the only piece marked with

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[539] ibid., p. 10.

[540] ibid. p. 276

[541] op. cit , Zuidervaart. p. 1

red ink, and is the only piece upon which the script has been applied horizontally. It also bears the word *PHILISTINE* in bold letters and is the only item in the whole installations that bears the artist's signature. It is leaning with the inscribed side to the wall, forcing the viewer to again come to terms with a reversed script. The text is taken from two separate locations in *Aesthetic Theory*. First (from the second chapter I *Aesthetic Theory*), "Situation":

> ...nothing is more damaging to theoretical knowledge of modern art than its reduction to what it has in common with older periods.[542]

Second, from "Art, Society, Aesthetics":

> Whoever concretely enjoys art is a philistine...actually the more they are understood, the less they are enjoyed.[543]

Adorno's rejection of historical contextual readings of modern art, fused with his rather bourgeois commentary are here adopted in an ironic defiance of interpretation; ironic because they encourage interpretation, defiant because they source aspects of Adorno's writing that reflect his troubled irreverence. It is for this reason the word *PHILISTINE* has been boldly repeated, and the artist's signature is so proudly displayed alongside.

Overall, the transparency of glass becomes a very simple representation of the renewed transparency of the text within the contemporary framework. However, a very gentle reminder of the difficulty of Adorno is evident in the three panes of glass that have been turned so as to present the text as reversed. This deliberate design forces the viewer to pause and concentrate, upsetting any ease with which the viewer might read the work. The staggered arrangement, reminiscent of a city-scape, means that some of the text is merged, accentuating the difficulty and mimicking Adorno's paratactical and chiastic formulae.

The final gesture – a lone, blank pane of glass – occupies a mere fraction of the physical space of the installation, however its subtlety belies its importance as a 'portal' whereby the viewer and the artist convene. The absolute transparency isolates the moment where representation and interpretation disappear, and come to find a neutral

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[542] op. cit., Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory* p. 25.

[543] ibid, p 15.

aesthetic field where both subject and object are free to impart or accept their will.

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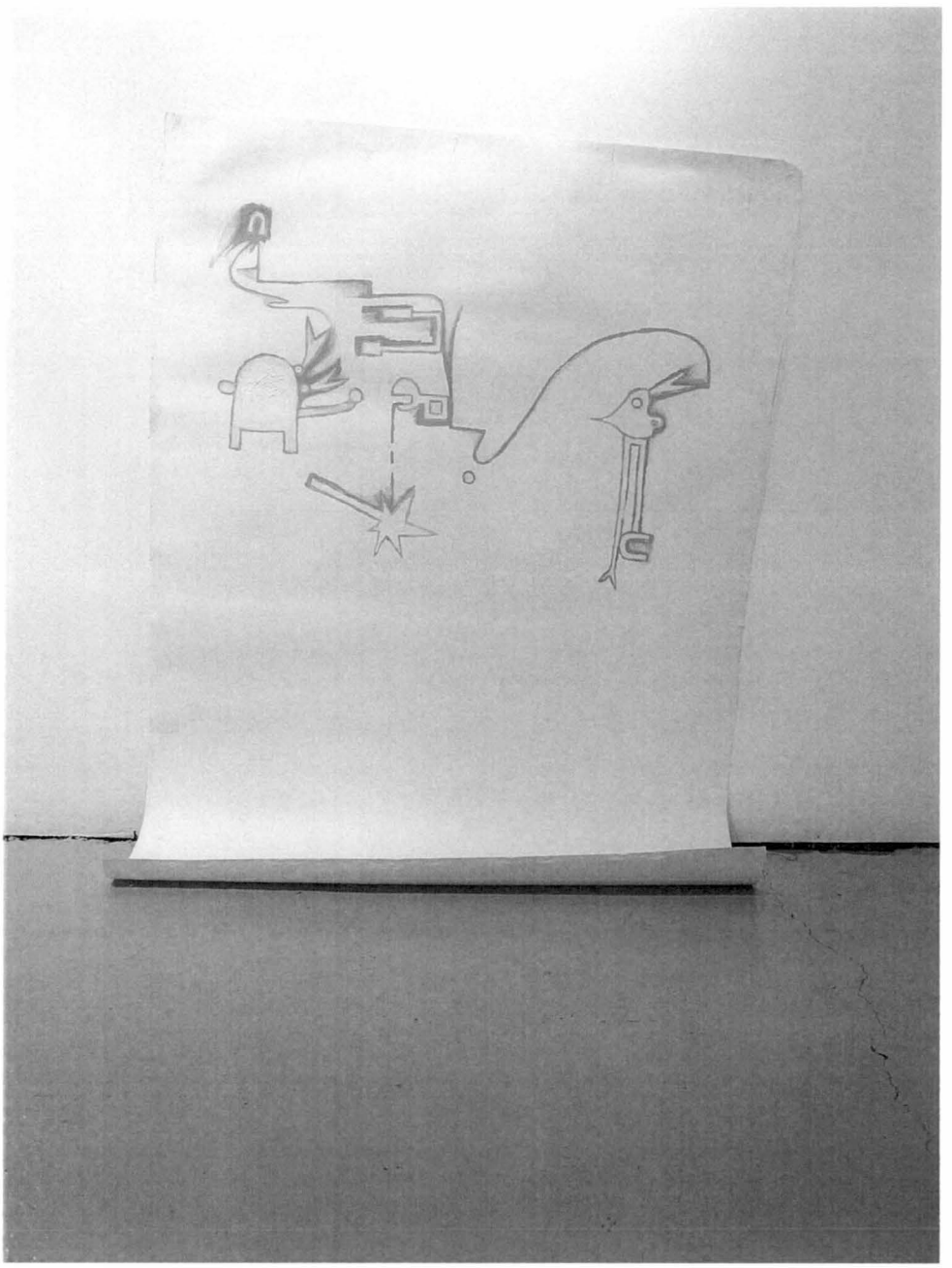
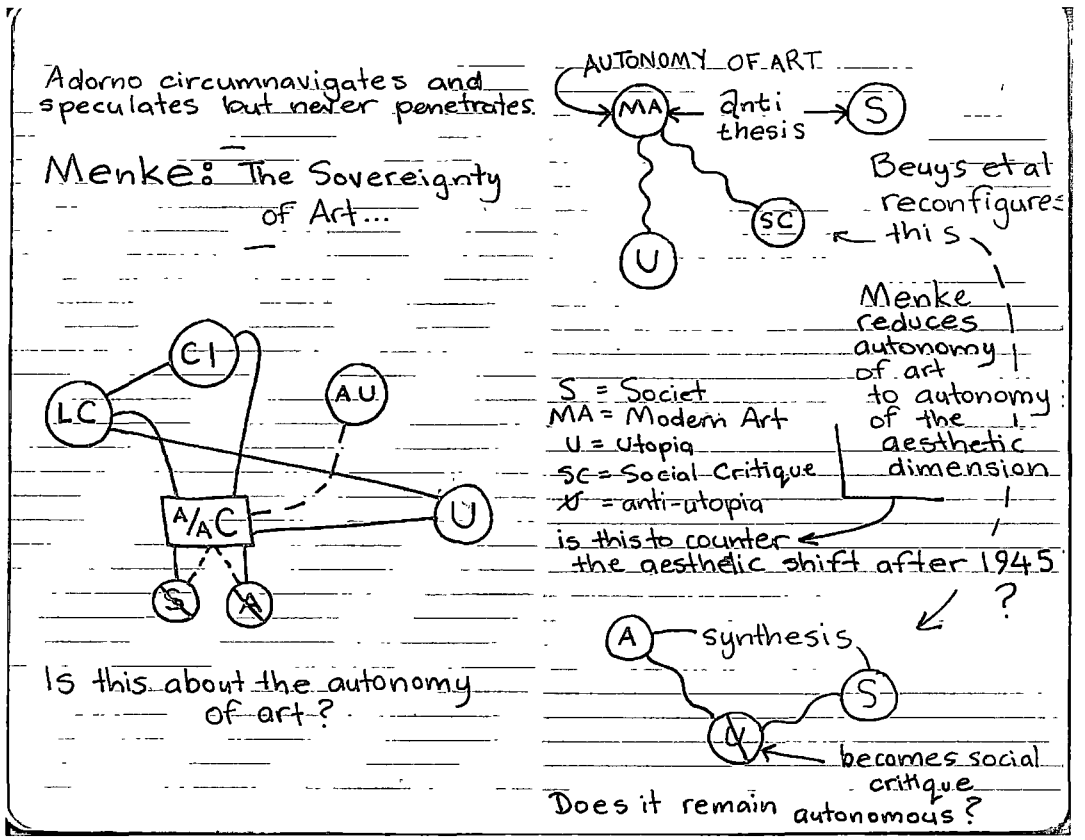


(Fig. 65) Detail: *So what of Adorno now?* (2008) Photograph Kevin Leong.

Less than a metre from the arrangement of glass panels is a painted work, somewhat anomalous to the installation's more sculptural arrangement. As the final work discussed in this collection of four works listed under the title *So what of Adorno now?*, it serves as an

exit point of some interest for this stylistic shift alone. While an over-simplification, this return to painterly form marks a reversal of the art-historical linearity that establishes two-dimensional art works as pre-figuring the sculptural and, much more so, the conceptual. How this work contributes to the greater aesthetic of the installation is perhaps best understood in relation to the first work discussed: *1996 / 2008*. I acknowledge that presenting this work as a progression (not only within *So what of Adorno now?* but within the installation) undoes certain claims regarding the artist's and the artwork's affinity with aesthetic and theoretical notions explicated elsewhere. However, it is only suggested as a means by which the viewer might understand the theoretical and aesthetic shifts that such a temporally bound work encounters, and its determination to include, rather than exclude, these points of change. Thus, the proposed comparative reading of the first work – *1996 / 2008* – and this final work, accepts this suggestion.

The most immediate difference between the two works is the uncluttered visual field in this final work, and the distinct absence of any sense of 'violation' of its surface. The pale blue abstract shapes possess subtle iconographic qualities, but are linked by a system of pink lines that have fused themselves to the outlines of the forms. While the deliberate ambiguity of the shapes confounds their organization, the ongoing referential links to Adorno hold some clues. First, and foremost, the design is a mock representation of Adorno's (and Horkheimer's) 'explication of the machinations of culture in advanced capitalism. However, critical to the work's contemporaneity, it playfully alters the reading so as to form its own subversive/submissive representation and place in the equation. Preparatory sketches and notation made after reading "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" from Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* show a mapping of the relationship between culture and capitalism:



(Fig. 66) Detail of working drawings: *So what of Adorno now?* (2008)

From the 'map' on the left, one can see the emerging forms that came to shape the design of the final painted element. Contemporary revision of this seminal text concede that, while certain features of the work remain historically valuable, the overall thesis fails to predict certain political and cultural shifts that undermine its philosophical force. Furthermore, Adorno's style has proven problematic in both reception and interpretation:

> ...essays filled with evocative and poetic aphorisms, paratactic sentences, and a basic repudiation of logical structure are fertile ground for the hermeneutic manufacture of clichés in favour of the attempt to seriously grapple with the arguments contained within. In other words, the manner in which the culture industry thesis is expressed often seems to get in the in the way of the substantive claims within.[545]

[545] Shane Gunster. "Revisiting the Culture Industry Thesis: Mass Culture and the Commodity Form" *Cultural Critique* (Volume 45, Spring, 2000) p. 40

Rather than 'revisit the Culture Industry thesis' as Shane Gunstan, and others[546] have done, I chose instead to represent it in warmer, less academic 'tones' so as to unclutter the theory and present to the viewer qualities so often missing in the reception of Adorno. Hence the choice of gentle colours and playful shapes: an elephant-like form; a magical wand; a bird-like figure and an upturned 'u' suggesting Adorno's up-ended utopianism. Furthermore, the positioning of the work – directly beneath the microphone and radio, its bottom edge curled up where it touches the ground – is critical to this reading. The microphone and its lead activate the visual field with a stark, mechanical linearity at odds with the pastel hues of the painting, recalling the strictness of the original thesis, and the Frankfurt School's earlier, overarching revision of dialectical models in cultural terms. The implications of its miscued hanging target institutions and their practices, namely galleries and museums and their traditions. By deliberately 'failing' to hang the work correctly, the painting presents a challenge to these norms and the mechanics of art production and presentation. While bound to a distinct conceptual and theoretical framework, this work, in harmony with the other present in *So what of Adorno now?* and the greater installation, closes the reading of *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008.*

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When de-installing *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008* I chose to destroy the work. Having revisited and reconsidered the performance via engagement with a range of philosophical texts, and extracting form from thought and *vice versa*, I believed a caesura must be forged in order to move forward with some level of clarity and freshness. The idea of storing the collective works away seemed at odds with much of the conceptual premise of the work. Thus, when the doors to the exhibition were closed for the last time, I proceeded to destroy and violate the work to the extent that it could never again be reconstructed. *1996 / 2008* was broken into fragments. *Fridges* was taken to a refuse station, where it was placed amidst a large mound of whitegoods and

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[546] Gunster points to Deborah Cook's *The Culture Industry Revisited: Theodor W. Adorno on Mass Culture* (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996) pp. 119-148 and Simon Jarvis in *Theodor Adorno: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory* (edited by Simon Jarvis, 4 Volumes, London. Routledge, 2005) pp. 72-90

car-bodies for removal.[547] The contents of *Arsenic* were poured onto *Dust*; the water turning the plaster powder into a solid form, altering its form and the concept. *Christianity* was dismantled and roughly graffitied with the phrase: "It is over." *Parsnip* was upended; the vegetables strewn across the gallery floor before they were disposed of, in the manner in which anyone might dispose of basic kitchen waste. *So what of Adorno now?* was taken apart and destroyed in separate parts: the amplifier spray-painted with an "X"; the glass panels, the microphone and the radio smashed with a hammer; and the painting torn to shreds. Needless to say, the resulting visual was somewhat chaotic, and the experience cathartic.

While the overuse of the term 'closure' deems it somewhat clichéd in this context, it is nevertheless apt to say that this action brought to the work, and the entire process, a necessary sense of finality. As is evident in the many pages herein committed to the unique qualities present in contemporary art, the conceptual nature of such works mean that they are never truly 'destroyed.' Furthermore, that the work existed *outside* the demands of commercial exchange made its obliteration a not unreasonable proposition in the context of the work's life-course. That the original performance was temporally isolated, and only able to be revisited by way of documentation and conceptualisation meant that it was not such an extreme act to commit upon the reinterpretation. These qualities, and, among the many others explicated, the critical distance between this work and those by Beuys, Kiefer and Darboven, deem *I Make Myself (sic) 1996 / I Still Make Myself (sic) 2008* an entirely different academic proposition in the course of this thesis. Indeed, as an Australian artist engaging aesthetically and philosophically with themes of German cultural significance, certain questions necessarily arise, most notably the concerning the "Why?" and "How?" of the connection between myself, as artist, and these themes. I might respond, cautiously, by proposing a freedom to exhibit playful absurdism not possible within the entanglement of German history and culture. While the themes themselves, do not warrant playfulness (and it would be remiss not to take them very seriously) such an approach opens avenues of contemplation that are necessarily closed to those too close to the trauma. With qualified respect and clear understanding of the difficulties, such an approach is wholly possible.

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[547] In one final act of conceptual contemplation, I recorded its position, curious to isolate the point when a work of art might *cease to be* a work of art. Clearly, such pursuits are evidence of concept outliving content, and could become the subject for an entire thesis unto itself, but for this moment, the photograph was sufficient as record of this possibility.

Alternatively, I might position the works as representing the shift from 'modernist self-reflection to post-modern meta-reflection' as demonstrated by that course of art-historical reading that considers the theorisation of art itself as the critical, self-reflexive entity shaping the work. There are truths in both of these responses; however, simply demonstrating philosophical engagement with the construction of a work of art on multiple levels serves to direct this research into a new realm whereby works of philosophy and works of art might be considered in unison.

SUMMARY

This thesis was shaped by the question: "What does a work of visual art do that philosophy does not?" It has come to answer this question by looking at how artists approach a topic, what cognitive procedures characterise the production of a work of visual art, and how the resulting work of art is viewed. Tracing this path from concept to form has exposed the points of distinction that I argue are critical to confirming the importance of art's contribution to philosophical inquiry. Most important among these points is visual art's capacity to conflate multiple and/or complex concepts within the immediate visual field. As the thesis progressed, it became increasingly clear that to extend one's association beyond mere intrigue, one must extract these conceptual complexities from within the visual. It came to be that this necessitated engagement with philosophical literature; however, it did so with the understanding that the visual field remained the key reference. Thus, as this thesis brought the work of art and the work of philosophy together as complementary or supplementary pursuits, it remained committed to presenting them as working in symbiosis so as to enhance our response to contemporary philosophical problems.

During the thesis' course the reader has encountered an expansive array of forms and objects constructed as representations of a similarly expansive array of concepts. Be it Anselm Kiefer's monumental, painterly depictions; Joseph Beuys's deeply personal expression of the *melancholia* of his trauma and guilt; Hanne Darboven's meticulously constructed temporal systems or the author's own engagement with the complex tapestry of the artistic and philosophical works encountered herein, this thesis traverses contemporary art's practical and theoretical landscape to fulfil its objective; to demonstrate what visual art *does* to admit entry to a unique philosophical realm. The thesis' progression demonstrates the shift from philosophy's permeation of art to the more trans-disciplinary diffusion of reference so as to bring forth a realm from whence philosophy might *retrieve* critical understanding; a realm this thesis has come to consider *post-philosophical.*

Beyond this central objective, the thesis has also developed a methodological platform, from whence the viewer/reader might exit the studies presented herein and consider her or his personal engagement with a work of art or a work of philosophy. From this position, the four, modestly refined studies encourage further engagement with questions concerning *the visual* and our understanding and utilisation of its particular qualities. As was suggested in the introduction, the ramifications of such engagement extend well beyond the confines of the academy. Indeed, I contend that there is a critical emancipatory potential for the decoded visual language within, but certainly not limited to, pedagogical and political theory and practice.

This thesis is a modest contribution, and thus somewhat removed from the grand scale of its claimed potential; however its recognition of the important role for artists and the work of art in philosophical inquiry as demonstrated by these four works of art, is directed at this objective. Artists engage with philosophy, and philosophers engage with art; of that there is no doubt. What this thesis does is shows *how*, and, importantly, how the social, political and philosophical crises of the last century make engagement with alternative contemplation and representations – in this instance, visual art – fundamental to contemporary philosophy.

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